TAMIL SAIVISM AND THE TRANSCENDING MESSAGE OF RAMALINGA SWAMY



T. DAYANANDAN FRANCIS







INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES
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Foreword

It is indeed a great pleasure and rare privilege for me to commend the book entitled **Tamil Saivism and the Transcending Message of Ramalinga Swamy**, to our scholars and readers interested in the study of the rich and variegated religious heritage of our country.

A serious academic, endowed with objective critical acumen, Dr. T. Dayanandan Francis is equally a good poet, dramatist and a powerful writer blessed with adequate imaginative faculty and a genuine feel for language. This rare combination in him coupled with his passion for his own cultural heritage and his formal training in theology shaped him as a good writer in all topics associated with the ethos of this land of spirituality. With all these rare gifts, he ventured into the task of analysing Saivism and the Ramalingar movement from the view point of a serious scholar with an objective bend of mind.

The author analyses the historical evolution of Tamil Saivism in the background of the religious climate existed in the classical Indian ethos and enunciates the unique aspects of this magnificent religion such as the concept of universal love, adoration of beauty, divine purpose of life and the Siddha marga which have added adequate strength to this religion to take deep roots in the Tamil soil and to withstand the onslaught of the

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heterodoxies (in this part of the Indian peninsula). The chapter on Saivite Theology is an objective presentation of this theologian about the various philosophical and theological tenets of Saivism and the depiction of its wonderful deity Siva both in the theological traditions of the Meykaṇṭasāstras and in the affective tradition comprising mainly of the canonical texts popularly known as Tirumuṟai. The mono-theistic character of this deity, his transcendental nature, his identification with luminous light and cosmic love etc., form the main subject for Dr. Daya's lively deliberation.

The first part of this book that deals elaborately with Tamil Saivism forms a powerful prelude to a clear understanding of the life and teachings of St. Ramalingar, one of the most unique devotees of Lord Siva, who inaugurated a protestant movement in Saiva religion by his effective interpretation of the significant components of this old religion and gave new dimension to it in the 19th century in accordance with the demands of his new religious climate and social milieu.

With a very interesting narration about the life of St. Ramalinga, Dr. Daya with his well equipped tools of Comparative Religion in which he has taken intensive training under the inspiring guidance of Prof. E.G. Porrinder and Prof. Fredhelm A. Hardy at the University of London, along with his extensive study of Tamil Language and literature under the good scholars of this land, coupled with his profound knowledge of Christian theology, enters into a thorough and in depth research of the transcending message of Ramalingar.

It is quite natural that St. Ramalingar was a product of the Indian renaissance of the 19th century and that the waves of renaissance with the broad knowledge about the socio-religious developments in various parts of the globe along with the works of proselytism by the Christian missionaries and the new interpretations given to classical texts in the light of the current social trends, exerted a deep impact on his personality and shaped him as a powerful harbinger of the reformation movement in Saivism.

Dr. Daya has made a very systematic study of the most significant teachings of St. Ramalingar as revealed in his poetical compositions with a deep comparative perspective comparing them with the Tirumuṟai poems of the Nāyaṉmārs and the compositions of the Tamil Cittars, chiefly with the teachings of Tirumūlar, Paṭṭiṉattār and Sivavākkiyar. This clearly revealed the fact that the personality of Ramalingar is a harmonious blending of the Saivite Bhaktas and the Tamil Siddhas. This revolutionary thinker of the 19th century has created a progressive movement in Saivism and launched it under the label **Camarasa Suddha Saṉmārkka Caṅkam**, incorporating into it. most of his newly acquired thoughts about social and religious amelioration. There is no doubt that St. Ramalinga was the first person in Hinduism from Tamilnadu to form an Association exclusively for the propagation of his own ideals with an egalitarian spirit inducting as members all like-minded people irrespective of caste and social barriers and in many respects he heralded the Theosophical movement which was initiated many years after his death. The poet in Dr. Daya is well revealed in his English renderings of the

poems of St. Ramalingar maintaining utmost fidelity the original without sacrificing its poetic charm and readability.

All credit go chiefly to the Christian scholars starting from Dr. G.U. Pope, the wonderful translator of the sacred utterances of Māṇikkavācakar' s Tiruvācakam to Dr. Fredhelm A. Hardy, the author of the epoch-making work in the study of Vaishnavism and the Āḻvār movement in Tamilnadu (Virahabhakti), in bringing to the notice of the international scholarship about the glory and grandeur of the rich religious heritage of the Tamil speaking community. Dr. Daya joins in the galaxy of such scholars of international repute by bringing out this handy volume on a revolutionary thinker of this land who was ridiculed as a heretic during his lifetime and glorified as a great saint without realizing his real merits after his demise. It is my wish that Dr. Daya should bring out more and more volumes of this kind with a view to provide basic material for the study of the Tamil heritage at the global level in a time when efforts are afoot to get global recognition to the rich and multi-dimensional linguistic and cultural heritage of the Tamil speaking community.

- G. John Samuel.

Dedicated to the Memory of
Revd. Dr. Professor **E.G. Parrinder,** Ph.D., D.D.

and

Professor Dr. **Fredhelm A. Hardy,** D.Phil.,
who taught me at
King's College, London
during 1974-75

- TDF

P R E F A C E

A study of Tamil Saivism and the Philosophy of Ramalinga Swamy undertaken thirty five years ago was pursued at King's College, University of London in 1974-75 when I did my post-doctoral studies under the able guidance of *Professors* **E.G. Parrinder** *and* **Fredhelm A. Hardy**. *Dr. Parrinder* helped me learn the indepth values in Comparitive Religion while Dr. Hardy impressed upon me the significance of textual exegesis in History of Religion. It was a delightful exercise for me to translate the Saivite texts and render the poems of Ramalinga Swamy and the Tamil Siddhas in blank verse in English.

As a token of my indebtedness to both of them I have dedicated the present work which represents a revised version of the original monograph.

I have tried to make an objective presentation of Saivite beliefs and highlight the Bhakti and Siddhi elements in the writings of Ramalinga Swamy, the synthesis of which he claims to be the 'most excellent way' This I have called the transcending message.

I am thankful to the Christian Literature Society for publishing Tamil Saivism in Tamil with two more chapters and the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society for bringing out a booklet on Ramalinga Swamy in 1972. I am also thankful to Messers. Motilal Banarsidass, Publishers who brought out an earlier version of the chapter on Ramalinga Swamy under the *title The Mission and Message of Ramalinga Swamy in 1990.*

I wish to express my grateful thanks to Dr. **John Samuel,** Director, Institute of Asian Studies for publishing the book in its present form and also for commending the same with a foreword.

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23.12 2006 - **T. Dayanandan Francis**

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Short		Long		Dipthong	
அ	a	ஆ	ā	ஐ	ai
இ	i	ஈ	i	ஔ	au
உ	u	ஊ	ū		
எ	e	ஏ	ē	ĀYTAM	
ஒ	o	ஓ	ō		k̲

CONSONANTS

Hard		Soft		Medial	
க்	k	ங்	n	ய்	y
ச்	c	ஞ்	ñ	ர்	r
ட்	t	ண்	n	ல்	l
த்	t	ந்	n	வ்	v
ப்	p	ம்	m	ழ்	l̲
ற்	r̲	ன்	n̲	ள்	l
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		ஜ்	j		

TAMIL SAIVISM

TAMIL SAIVISM

A Religion of Antiquity

Saivism is an ancient religion. It is as old as the history of the Tamil people. Scholars are of the view that it is impossible to pin-point accurately the period or era in history when Saivism came into existence. They assert, however, that the cult of Siva was in a dominant position long before the period of recorded history. In ancient Tamil literature there are references to Saivism. To some extent its terminology is preserved in them. The word Sivam occurs in Rig Veda. The God of the Saivites, Lord Siva or Sivaperuman, transcends time; he is eternal. Saint *Māṇikkavācakar beautifully* expresses this fact in verse by saying that Lord Siva is 'a fine synthesis of tradion-based antiquity and a newness oriented to contemporary life'.

In Rig Veda, the word 'Sivam' as an adjective has been used as the equivalent of the Tamil word mankalam, which carried different shades of meaning such as 'moral or religious merit', 'perfection', 'praise', 'light' and 'lamp'. The term was applied to 'Urutiran' or Lord Siva. In Svetesvatara Upanishad, the word maya is used in the sense it is used in Saiva Siddhanta.It denotes the material cause of the universe. In this Upanishad, God is exalted in the same manner as Saivism adores Lord Siva. Further the theistic concept of God as a person is presented in unmistakable terms. So also the doctrines of prasada (Guru's grace) and Bhakti which are dominant in Tamil Saivism. The great epic Mahabharata places Lord Siva on the highest pedestal as the great God who transcends all limitations and who is far superior to all earthly and celestial beings; His wisdom and will none can

comprehend. His form is said to be that of lingam. According to scholars, Saivite way of life and worship must have been in existence in many parts of the Indian subcontinent dating back from time prior to 400 B.C. Some are of the view that Kashmiri Saivism is as antique as Tamil Saivism. Lingayat Saivism, however, belongs to a later era.

We learn from *Tolkāppiyam*, the Tamil Grammar classic, that one of the terms the ancient Tamils used to refer to God was Kantaḻi. Two other terms used by them were 'Kodinilai' and 'vaḷḷi'. Kantaḻi is a combination of two words: i.e. 'Kantu' which means 'limitation' and 'aḻi' which means 'without'. The Supreme God, who is the ultimate reality, is free from all bonds or fetters.All living beings are bound by fetters. The Tamils preferred to use the term 'Kantaḻi' as it highlights his perfect state of freedom. Probably they were aware of the existence of the three eternal entities namely God (pati) living being (pasu) and bonds (pasam) the basic doctrines of Saiva Siddhanta. The Sanskrit word Sivam means 'auspicious', 'joy', 'The Omniscient One', 'The Holy One'. Sivam also is claimed by some to be a pure Tamil word, stemming from the root Semmai, which means 'perfection'.

The Path of Love

Saivism has placed great emphasis on the path of love and compassion which its adherents are required to follow.A fundamental Saivite belief is that Sivam is unconceivable and inseperable from love.

Tirumūlar has expressed this thought in verse form. He says, 'It is the ignorant who would say that God and love are separate

entities; blessed are those who know that God and love are one.They are endowed with true spiritual discernment'.

Some grammarians hold that the Tamil word *A<u>n</u>bu* (love) is a combination of two words (al+pu) which means 'without self' or negation of self. This implies that first and foremost, love is denial of or absence of self. The person with love and compassion is one who is always actively concerned about the welfare and happiness of the fellow beings.

The code of love as defined is Saivism demands relentless compassion to all living creatures.All life is sacred and the Saivites should strictly refrain themselves from killing and meat-eating. The basic Saivite concept of love is that every living being dwels in and emanates from Siva. So the practise of universal love is stressed in Saivism.Tāyumā<u>n</u>avar is quite enraptured by this ideal and he expresses his wish in a verse saying 'Let the whole world vow not to kill; oh! how my heart yearns to spread this message!'

Ramalingaswamy, popularly known as *Vaḷḷalār* proclaims that all the deeds of those who see the oneness of life in all beings are deeds of divine grace indeed.

The practice among Saivites of applying *Tirunīru* 'holy ash' on the forehead and of wearing *uruttirāṭcam* (beads) has a highly symbolic value. It emphasises purity of heart and tenderness of soul. Saivite way of life also emphasises love towards God as well as fellow worshippers of Siva.True devotees are spotless and pure in heart like holy ash according to Sēkkiḻār's Periyapurāṇam.

The purāṇās say that uruttirāṭcam proceeded from Lord Siva's eyes. Thus it is a symbol of compassion.

True disciples of Siva who have love in their hearts for their Lord could also have undying love for fellow disciples. Periyapurāṇam is full of noble acts of love, compassion and charity performed by great Saivite Saints. Sēkkiḻār' aptly says that for true devotees of Siva, the jewels are urutiratcham (beads) and they would delight in wearing simple rags and their zeal in life would be the service to their Lord. Their hearts will overflow with love and they will not lack anything in any living condition.

Those who have chosen to practise compassionate love as the guiding principle of their lives are of the firm conviction that every life and every living creature has its existence in the immediate presence of the great God. Therefore, every corporeal body and the life breathing therein constitute a sacred temple. They worship God not only in his temple but they also recognise his presence in all living creatures who are indeed 'mobile temples'.

When once all animate creatures that live and breath were looked upon as moving temples and worshipped with reverence, there is absolutely no place for discrimination or strife based on religion, caste and creed. Such was the high order of divine worship among the Saivites. For them divine worship and reverence for all life were inseparatble virtues. They are co-existent. Saivites believe that whatever offering or charity we give to God's creatures prompted by compassion is tantamount to an offering to the Supreme God who is augustly present in his holy

temple. The great Tamil poetical classic *Tirumantiram* gives expression to this noble concept of true worship.

Saint Appar unequivocally asserts that a true worshipper of Siva, in whatever lowest state he might be, even the most despicable castaway or a victim of the foulest disease with all his limbs rotting and festering the terminal stage of decay, such one is no abomination if he is a worshipper of Siva. In fact such a person should be greatly venerated.

The Doctrine of Universality

Saivism claims to preach an universal code of life and conduct; its doctrines are universally acceptable and they transcend all barriers of caste; all those who have love and compassion are taken to be in reality Saivites. Sēkkiḻār drives home this thought when he says, 'It does not matter what your station in life is and your appearance. The only thing that matters is whether you cling to the feet of Lord Sankara'. He also speaks of 'all those blessed souls who live beyond the domain of the three Tamil kings, who have attained the feet of Lord Siva'. The three Kings referred to here are the Cēra, Cōḻa and Pāṇṭiyas of the Tamil country. The implication is that Saivism in its thought and spirit extended beyond geographical and political frontiers. Tiru Vi.Kalyanasundaranar (Tiru Vi. Ka.), a liberal minded Saivite Tamil scholar goes so far as to affirm that Saivism while standing apart and maintaining it s identity has also permeated all the other religions. In other words, Saivism has been claimed to enfold all mankind in one fraternal bond. Saivite sages have strongly denounced inter-religious strife and acrimony and

pleaded for a clear and meaningful religious perspective and universal brotherhood.

The Saivites have all along been of the firm conviction that Lord Siva is supreme and that He towers above all other gods that humankind can think of. Saint Appar highlights this theme and his poetic lines may be appropriately quoted in this regard. He says, 'Oh ye wretched folks, why are ye confounded by vain wranglings and disputations? Whoever be the gods that ye exalt, Lord Siva alone is supreme and none can be his peer!'. Again he says, 'Senseless people with their hearts full of spite may found an entirely new faith and seek to elevate other gods, but Lord Siva alone is supreme and worthy of praise and adoration in such a religion'.

There is one great God who rules over all creation and is full of grace: He is known in the land of the south-Tamil country- as Lord Siva. This is affirmed in the Tamil devotional classic *Tiruvācakam* and the relevant verse says:

'Praise to Lord Siva, Lord of the Southern domain:
Praise to Lord Siva, who is as well God of all nations!'.

There may be as many as six roads, all leading to the same city. Similarly all religious and spiritual quests converge on the one ultimate reality and knowledge of God. This is the basic conviction of the Saivites. Tirumūlar stresses this and he is vehement in his criticism of cranky zealots who indulge in foolish debates about the six philosophical systems, each claiming his own to be the supreme one. He likens them to dogs barking at a mountain!

Tāyumāṉavar also gives effective utternace to the universality of all faiths when he says:

'How many are these varying faiths and religions!
When I look deep Oh Lord, they are
But thy holy pranks and thou revealest
Thyself in them all!'

Ramalingaswamy is another great saintly poet and thinker who is deeply immersed in the spirit of religous universality. He exclaims: 'Do thou ask to know the name of my master, the great and gracious God of mercy and compassion? I call Him Arukan, Buddha, Ādi Nārayaṇa and Ādi Siva; and I call Him Sada Siva, Sakti Sivam, Biramman, Turuva Sua, Turia, Sutta Sivam etc. Why not? I delight in the myriad names I can so freely ascrible to my beloved Lord! These are expressions of his divine play'.

Here we get a glympse into his soul and his inner vision. Truly his concept of God transcentds all religious and philosophical sectarianism. 'All God's names be hallowed' says Martin Buber.

Eminent Saivite leaders have emphasised that Sanmarkkam (Sat-marga) - the highest path, is the essential basis for universality in religious outlook and practice. An ethical life essentially means the path of truth. To know the ultimate reality - the great God- the all pervading Lord of the whole universe - the spirit of universality should permeate our mind and soul, our mental outlook and our social life too. Tiru.Vi. Ka. unequivocally asserts that a happy society enjoying social justice cannot be built except on a sound ethical structure.

Adoration of beauty - a basic trait in Tamil Culture

The Tamils lived in constant communion with nature; nature's exquisite beauty and loveliness was a source of awe, wonder and exhilaration to them and they instinctively lost themselves in adoration of God's magnificent handiwork. They called it *'muruku'*. The meaning of this word is 'beauty','youth', 'fragrance' and 'immortality'. The Tamils believed that God revealed Himself through nature, which contained these heavenly attributes in a perfect blend. In the course of long usage, this word muruku which means 'beauty' acquired the masculine suffix 'an' and became *Murukan̲*. The word Murukan̲ came ultimately to be applied to God. The Tamils have all along been referring to Lord Siva as *Cokkan̲* (The Beautiful One). This is a characteristic trait in Tamil culture and is worthy of special note. Saint Appar begging for God's favour, calls out, 'Oh my God of beauty, my father, I earnestly beseech thy grace!'.

Also Aruṇakirinātar, an ardent worshipper of Lord Murukan̲, praises His beauty and elegrance in sheer ecstacy and delight. His verse says:

'Oh, my Lord Muruka, how winsome you are!
Bearer of lordly frame and beauteous visage
You feed me with heavenly wisdom,
My Lord, you are indeed fair, graceful, great and mighty!'.

Kanta Purāṇam is a classical work in Tamil Saivite Literature; it has been fully dedicated to the praise of Lord Murukan̲. In this work, Murukan̲ is represented as Lord Siva's

son. This of course contradicts the traditional Saivite concept which looks upon Murukan as birthless and deathless a god with neither beginning nor end. According to the Purāṇās *Murukan̲* emanated from Lord Siva's eyes, was borne by wind and fire and he played as a babe on the reeds of the tank-bed and on mother earth. Looking deep into this, we are led to infer that *Murukan̲* is the First cause and originator of the five elements, the earth, water, fire, wind and sky. The Purāṇās teach us that *Murukan̲* is the God of nature. Tiru. Vi. Ka. strongly pleads that wise men would do well to study this teaching deeply with the help of learned works on the subject and grasp its mystery and significance.

He holds that the usual representation of Murukan, as a son of Lord Siva is deeply meaningful and calls for concerted study. The Supreme being is the great God, the supremely intelligent One - *Sachidananda.* This signifies moral perfection, holiness, truth, intellgence and bliss, which are the unique attributes of God. This, the Purāṇās say, finds its parallel in human relationships of father, mother and son. This is exactly what the terms *'Sōmās Kandha Mūrtham'* conveys and it means Lord Siva in conjugal bond with goddess *Umai* or *P ārvati* and their son *Kantan̲* or *Subramaṇya.*

Kanda Purāṇam also praises Murukan̲ with equal size and places Him on par with Lord Siva Himself. It says: 'Siva is Murukan̲ himself and Murukan̲ is none other than Siva'. It also lays stress on the father-son relationship between Siva and Murukan̲ and affirms that Murukan̲ is not different from Siva. Another verse in praise of Murukan̲ says:

'Lord Siva in his holy will and pleasure condescended to become a little babe - a child without spot and blemish, who is Lord Murukan, the god endowed with six faces; neither is he different from Lord Siva. He is a glorious light from Lord Siva himself, just like the dazzling rays radiating from the most precious sapphire!'.

Meaning and Divine Purpose in LIfe - Here and Now

It should be emphasised that Saivism is not a religion that scorns this world and life, which we live here. On the other hand Saivite philosophy and thought give meaning and significance to earthly life and *Māyai* (energy) is the first cause and source out of which the earth was formed and broght into existence. This universe is meaningful; earthly life is full of significance. The concept of *Māyai* is basic to the evolution of Saivism. How then can this religion afford to belittle this universe which itself emanated from *Māyai?* Saivism believes that God is zealously concerned and anxious that His creatures should be liberated from ignorance. With this great purpose in view, he has endowed them not only with physical bodies and mental and intellectual faculties but has also given them this earth for a habitation.

Saivism is firmly entrenched in its certainty about the beauty, the meaning and the purpose of this universe, the world and the earthly life of God's creatures. That being so, there is no place in it for the doctrine of life - negation. At the same time, Saivism disagrees with the materialistic view which believes that this universe and the world which we know and feel with our physical senses is the only ultimate reality and that nothing substantive or supreme exists apart from it. God's prime concern

is that his creatures should attain perfection. It is as a means to that overall purpose that he has created the world and has ordained this life. Saivism accepts the world and earthly life as aid to attain perfection as conceived in the mind of god.

Sampantar expresses his absolute trust in Lord Siva's goodness and love towards mankind. The substance of his song is:

> ' The great Lord Siva along with his consort *Pārvati,* the perfect women, dwells in His temple in the beautiful city of Sīrkāḻi. He is infinite goodness itself. From day unto day we can live happily in this world. In his hands our perfection and ultimate destiny are safe and sure!'.

A Saivite saint worthly of mention in this context is Saint Suntarar. He was not a celibate, but lived a life of happy wedlock with his two wives *Paravai* and *Sankili.* He is rapturously thankful to Lord Siva and joyfully says: 'We lack nothing, great and benevolent Lord Siva - I and my exquisitely beautiful wives *Paravai* and *Sankili Nācciyār* and thou hath given me. Thou art our refuge, safe and sure!'.

Saivism treats matter and our physical body as objective realities endowed with meaning and purpose. At the same time it unreservedly believes in the spirit world and the spiritual view of life. The spirit is in union with and dwells in the physical body and it also transcends the body.'The spirit that permeates the earth - indwelling and transcending', is a concept frequently stressed in Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

Siddha Mārga

Saivism is a Siddha Marga. It means that it believes in and upholds the spiritual view of life and of this universe. It has no room for any materialistic philosophy. From time immemorial, religion and the spiritual life have thrived in Tamil soil and a spiritual milieu has prevailed. Tiru. Vi. Ka. is of the opinion that in earlier times the same spiritual mood had spread and prevailed among all the peoples of the world. The spiritual view of life has been claimed and cherished as belonging uniquely to Tamil culture and tradition. This claim is of great significance and thought-provoking. In one of his songs *Aruṇakirinātar* extols the beauty and richness of the religion of the Tamil people and affirms that it is the perfect path to spiritual truth and ultimate reality.

The first spiritual leaders who founded the Siddha religion and philosophy were called siddhas (Cittarkaḷ). They were also gifted poets and their poetry is deeply spiritual; their sacred lyrics are highly inspiring and contain sublime thoughts. Thirumantiram is one of the oldest classics on Saivite religion; its author *Tirumūlar* was himself a Siddha. The book contains songs of praise along with an elaborate commentary and explanations. The songs are the quitnessence of Siddha philosophy and philosophic truth. Also many of the Siddhas who came after him, have sung in adoration of God Siva. According to priestly tradition, among the Vaishnavites, Saint *Natamuni* was a Siddha.

The sacred book *Tēvāram* divided persons who have adopted the spiritual religious path in life, broadly into two

classes; those who are striving to see God are Bhaktas or devotees and those who have already had the supreme privilege of seeing god and attaining illumination of soul are Siddhas. All the Siddhas are alike in their spiritual experience and divine wisdom; but each has his own way of giving expression to his spiritual quest. This is the reason why the Siddhas rise above all religious barriers. Their poetry breathes the spirit of universal religion and brotherhood, and pleads for an ethical life-view completely free from sectarian limitations.

When the *'Siddha Mārga'* was declining in the Tamil country and losing its vitality, there arose four eminent men who endeavoured to give a healing touch to the faith. They were *Appar, Sampantar, Suntarar* and *Māṇikkavācakar.* Their sacred songs reveal deep spiritual insights and they are highly edifying to the human soul. Those men contributed in no small measure to the resurgence of the Siddha tradition. They speak of sublime themes such as the immortal life that knows not death, giving expression to the deepest longing of the human heart down through the ages.

Appar feels quite sure that Lord Siva has alrady saved him from death and in a song he jubilantly declares that whoever keeps Lord Siva in his heart and reposes absolute trust in him is free from the evils of hunger, privation, old age and death. He gets hold of supreme bliss here and now.

Suntarar also has absolute faith in the love and benevolence of Lord Siva. He sings:'Oh, Lord Siva, my master, thou hast freed me from the cycle of births and deaths in this wretched world and filled me with Thy abundant grace. No more births for me! This is

a rare favour and supreme honour that thou hast been pleased to besotw on me. With this joyous centainty, my Lord, eternal bliss is mine and my heart craves for nothing else'

According to Saivite tradition and sacred records, these four Saints - *Appar, Sampantar, Suntarar* and *Māṇikkavācakar* - did not die but got merged in God and attained deathless life and eternal bliss. After them there arose in the same Siddha lineage, *Tāyumāṉavar, Paṭṭiṉattaṭikaḷ, Aruṇakiriyār, Ramalinga Swamy* and others. Ramalinga Swamy specially claims that he belongs to this ancestral line and that he is one of the Siddhas. Others worthy of mention in this lineage of Siddhas are P*attirakiriyār, Sivavākkiyar, Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar, Iṭaikkāṭṭu Cittar, Akappēy Cittar* and *Kutampai Cittar.*Their songs are lucid and well-written and can be sung with ease and relished by anyone with a flair for sacred folk music. They are very delightful, highly inspiring and teach sublime truths.

2. SAIVITE THEOLOGY

Grace or Knowledge?

Saivite literature may be classified under two categories. The works containing the sacred songs and biographies of the great Saivite Saints who have been deeply nurtured in the holy life, belong to the first category. Those written from the standpoint of philosophy and devoted to the study of the basic tenets of Saivasm, come under the second category. The songs of *Appar, Suntarar, Sampantar, Māṇikkavācakar* and others, and *Sēkkiḻār's Periyapurāṇam.*pertain to the first kind. These and a number of other works have come to be collectively called the *'Pa<u>nn</u>iru Tirumu<u>r</u>ai'* (12 sacred books).*Meykaṇṭār's Sivañā<u>n</u>abōtam, Aruḷnanti Sivāccāriyār's Sivañā<u>n</u>a Sitti, Umāpatiyār's Sivapprakāsam,* and a few other books belong to the second category. These are fourteen in all and they collectively bear the title *Meykaṇṭa Sāttiram.*

Just like the Vedas and Agamas the books constituting Pa<u>nn</u>iru Ti<u>r</u>umu<u>r</u>ai should be treated as revelatory in nature. They are true and authentic records; and they portray the spiritual experience of the great men of the Saivite faith. They also tell us about the attributes of God and His love and benevolence towards humankind. God desires to become poor and lowly so as to identify himself with his devotees. He is inseparably bound by cords of love to his creatures. His supervening grace and dynamic activity for the supreme good of his saints and favoured ones is beyond the pale of human knowledge in terms of knowledge and reasoned thinking. The bond of love and devotion that exists

between the saints and their Lord need not necessarily be incapable of rational explanation or human comprehension.

Saivite Saints did not believe in knowledge and critical investigation as foremost aids towards acquiring knowledge of God and of things pertaining to the higher life; nor did they count on intellectual efforts to promote a spirit-filled life centred on God. Néither the principle of casuality (cause and effect theory) nor any elaborate illustration can help anyone to feel absolutely certain about the existence of God. These saints were strongly convinced that God stoops to receive our love and devotion to him.

Indeed 'the God of grace' is the basic concept in Saivite Theology. Saint *Tirunāvukkaracar* (Appar) stresses that grace and mercy are the dominant characteristics of God:

'........ God, the incomparably great, the unknowable, He belongs to no nation or city. How can man with his puny mind seek to portray the great and mighty God of the universe? Unless God in His condescending grace and mercy grants the vision, no one can ever know him.'

Māṇikkavācakar also speaks of 'Worshipping at his feet only through his grace'.

Anyone desiring to codify and understand Saivite Theology must first bear in mind that Saivisim is fundamentally a religion of grace. The interpretations given in the texts of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy are hardly sufficient for a clear understanding of Saivite Theology. The 12th Tirumuṟai, namely Periyapurāṇam, is a collection of the biographies of great Saivite saints. These life-

stories are thrilling and heart-warming. These and a few other books are helpful to some extent in enlightening us regarding the grandeur and sublimity of Saivite Theology.

One God

Saivism is essentially mono-theistic. 'One humanity and one God!' has been its rallying cry down through the ages. We find its earliest expression in *Tirumantiram*, which is perhaps the oldest written work in Tamil Saivite literature. In Saivism we find plentious expression of the sure conviction that there is one God who is the creator, preserver and protector of the entire universe. The word 'Sivam' has no sectarian limitation. It stands for the one supreme God of the universe - the only perfect divine being. Sivam, one of the *Tirimūrtis*, (The Hindu Trisad) is not the God of Saivism alone. Sage *Māṇikkavācakar* sings in his beautiful verse:

'Praise be to Lord Siva of the Southern domain:
Praise be to Lord Siva, God of all nations!'.

The God of all the nations and people of the earth is known as Sivam in the land of the Tamils. This Sivam is the God and Lord of all humankind.

He transcends everything

The Saivites firmly believe in the existence of one and only God: they also worship him as a transcendent God who has no limitations. We have observed that the word kantaḻi found in the Tamil grammar classic *Tolkāppiyam* indicates that God is an infinite being subject to no limitations whatever. Paṭṭiṉattār says that God is the Eternal One, transcending time - the past, the

present and the future. No human language can adequately describe him. In the Tamil classic *Cilappatikāram*, God is referred to as the unique, infinite one, eternally existing, devoid of any beginning or birth.

Tirumāl, *Biramma* and other gods are deemed to be subject to the phenomena of birth and death. *Tirunāvukkaracar*, praising Lord Siva says 'Millions of Brahmas were born and died and millions of Narayanas came and then ceased to exist; there is only one God, Lord Siva who exists eternally and for all times and he has no beginning or end!'.

He is unknowable

The great God of the universe who stands apart and above the entire creation in uncomparable glory and power surpasses all human knowledge and understanding. His wisdom and his will are unfathomable. *Māṇikkavācakar* says 'Neither mortals of this earth, nor heavenly beings nor the spirits of the under-world nor the inhabitants of other worlds can know Him'. Neither, as *Suntarar* affirms, is he known by wise men and learned priests who have mastered the four Vedas and who spend their time ceaselessly in worshipping at His feet. No mortal, of his own accord, can ever hope to know the mind and character of God.

He is transcendent God; unknowable and too great and wise for human understanding yet, he is not absentee God who stands apart and far off from his creation. We are not expected to worship him in an impersonal way without really knowing anything about him. The great God who stands apart in infinite glory and greatness is also gracious and he has personal

relationship with his creation. He manifests his divine activity in and through them. This is the sure belief, firmly cherished and preached by Saivite devotees. In other words, the God of Saivism is both a transcendent and an immanent God.

He is omnipresent

The word Kaṭavuḷ (God) means the one who transcends all things and all limits. Likewise the word also signifies that he is omnipresent. He is present everywhere and He pervades the entire universe. Saivism affirms that this world and all its living creatures have been eternally existent and they know no beginning. However, it points out that their eternal existence without a beginning, does not entitle them to parity with God. When compared to the infinite grandeur and majesty of God, they should be deemed as inanimate. All their knowledge, wisdom and power pale into insignificance before his unfathomable wisdom, power and omniscience. It is God who creates, sustains, indwells and animates the world and the living creatures and his divine activity operates in and through them. This is the firm and unassailable Saivite belief regarding the relationship between God and His creation. This is emphasised with complete unanimity in all Saivite devotional literature as well as in Saivite metaphysical writings.

Many great men of Saivism have likened this unique relationship between God and His creation to the relationship between the first letter of the Tamil alphabet (a) and all the other letters of the language. Akaram (a) being the first letter and first of the vowels, occupies a primal position, playing a dynamic role in the language both by itself standing apart and also by merging

with the consonants. The great Tamil poet *Tiruvaḷḷuvar* has given expression to this cardinal thought in Saivite theology, in the very first verse of his immortal poetical work *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.

While speaking about Lord Siva's unique character and personality, we should always remember that he exists as a supreme mind and he is the fullness and the repository of all knowledge. Just as akaram (a) is the life animating and activating all other letters of the language, God provides the light of knowledge and understanding to all living creatures and he is fully present not only in living creatures but in all corporeal matter (material universe).

If that be so, the question arises as to who is God? Whether God is the world and whether God is the life therein? The Saivite answer to these questions is both yes and no. The answer is yes in the light of the fact that God indwells fully and inseparably in his world and the life therein. On the other hand, the world is mere corporeal. Both animate and inanimate have no knowledge or mental illumination of their own. Therefore they are not God as such.

Saivite thinkers affirm that just as the ethereal element sky is present inseparably in the four palpable elements - wind, fire, water and earth, in like manner God is present inseperably in his creation - the animate as well as the inanimate.

The Saivite poet Tiṟumūlar cites the example of two persons looking at the image of an elephant carved in wood. The first one has considerable knowledge about trees and he is only interested in the kind of tree and the quality of the wood that has gone into

the making of the elephant. He exclaims:' No; certainly this is not sandal wood!'. The second person is of an artistic mind and he looks at the wooden elephant as a work of art. He remarks; 'I feel that the tusk of this elephant ought to have been made more shapely'. The object looked at is the same; but in the first person we see the typical materialist. He sees it merely as a piece of wood and there is no thought of the elephant in his mind. The second person is an artist by temperament; looking at the piece, he actually visualises the shape and form of an elephant. This is exactly how the universe and Lord Siva manifest themselves differently to the people of this world.

The Saivite Saints had the spiritual vision to see God dynamically present and active in his world as well as in nature and in all living creatures. This sublime world view - this interplay of divine activity - is the quintessence of the spiritual experience of Saivite saints as expressed by them. This is the theme that has been beautifully expressed in song by several Saivite Saints, each in his own though and verse form. The songs of Māṇikkavācakar, *Suntarar, Appar,* Tirumūlar and Sēkkiḻār are some typical examples. Their songs are steeped in praise and gratitude to Lord Siva for condescending to reveal himself to his yarning saints and devotees in and through the world, the elements and the living creatures, which he has made and which owe their very existence to him.

The infinite God - the omnipotent and omniscient One - dwells in his entire creation and manifests himself in all animate things; even in the most insignificant of them. All Saivite poets and saints without a single exception have cherished and given

rapturous expression to this inspiring and awesome concept of God. In visualising his infinite goodness and grandeur, they have felt their hearts and souls being filled with sheer delight and ecstasy. They have made liberal use of many words and expressions to describe the infinite and heavenly status of God alongside his immanence - his indwelling presence in the world and all living creatures, which are his handiwork. These words and expressions are deeply meaningful. The best and the most profound of them all is the word 'Light'. We find the expressions 'Heavenly Light' and 'Soul's Light' used thousands of times in their songs and lyrics while referring to God. The concept emanates from the basic understanding that he is transcendent. He transcends all limitations and he is present everywhere.

The God who shines as Glorious Light

God, the creator of the universe is almighty; his power can cast away all forms of darkness. He is worthy to be praised and hailed as the Heavenly Light, the Celestial Flame and the Light Incomparable. Just like the sun, God's light is in himself - matchless and defying all human language and expression; its brilliance our minds cannot conceive. In contrast, the light manifested by the living beings of his creation is but reflected light.

The great Saivite saints have always been irresistibly fascinated and entranced by the splendour of God's Light. The very thought of his holiness and perfection thrilled and delighted them. The songs they have sung in praise of this Supreme Light contain delightful and powerful expressions, which are deeply

heart-warming and soul-stirring. A few examples are cited to illustrate their sublime poetry of praise.

'The rarest Light of Great brilliance'
'The Supreme Light from heaven shining eternally'
'The celestial Flame that knows no beginning or end'
- *Māṇikkavācakar.*

'The Effulgent God who shines from afar,
whom earthly mortals comprehend not!'
'The Light that illumines all created worlds!'
'The Blessed Light, the hope of the world!'

'O God of glory, the Light paramount,
'Thou who shines in matchless radiance!'
- *Appar*

'The Light that celestials comprehend not!'
'The lone light that shines in matchless splendour!'
'The Light of Lights, the glorious God!'
'Great God, O Holy Light
perfect, spotless and most pure!'
'The Light indescribable!'
- *Suntarar*

'The Light excellent full of grace!'

- *Vaḷḷalār*

These poetic expressions solemnly declare that God is the Light of heaven and the Light of the world, and that he is the supreme Light; he also dwells in the world of his creation and in the living creatures therein. He is the God who cleanses and purifies before whose perfect and all-consuming light, all forms of darkness flee and vanish. This is no mere poetic fancy but the actual personal experience of his devotees, expressed in their inimitable poetry in outpouring gratitude. A few examples given hereunder are worthy of our deep reflection.

'The Light that illuminates all earth's life!'
- *Suntarar*
'O great God, Heavenly King, the Light of my soul!'
'The Light that floods my soul!'
- *Appar*
'O great Light, all pervasive effulgence!'
The soul-filling ambrosia!'
- Māṇikkavācakar

Māṇikkavācaka's poetry overflows with praise of God and his outpouring gratitude to him. He affirms that the Lord has liberated him from all worldly lusts and desires and has graciously freed him from the clutches of the treacherous five senses. To meditate on God and to worship him is to savour the heavenly nectar. He claims: 'The Lord has taken abode even in this lowly heart of mine and the celestial light shines and illuminates my entire being'.

Tāyumāṉavar hails God as 'The Light of infinite splendour' and 'the light of my soul'. In grateful praise he says, 'O Lord, I

thank thee for filling my soul with thy august presence and for banishing all my fears and worries'.

To say that metaphysical knowledge and theological expositions are essential to know him would be flagrantly wrong and unfair; for he is great, infinitely good and benevolent and he reveals himself as the shining light, spotless and most perfect. He is the god who banishes all forms of darkness and evil.

Siva is Love

God is Love. God is Sivam (Anpē Sivam). It would be quite appropriate to say that this statement sums up the entire Saivite doctrine and concept of God.

'It is the ignorant who say that love and Siva are separate!
O mortals, know ye not love and Siva are one?
Ye that know this shall ever be one with love and Siva!'

God is Love; he is love personalised. Indeed it is on this one single theme that all the sacred hymns in those two great Saivite poetical works *Tēvāram* and Tiruvācakam are composed. The great Saivite saints *Tāyumāṉavar, Paṭṭiṉattār, Kumara-kuruparar, Vaḷḷalār* and many others saw God in their inner vision (soul vision) in the form of overpowering love and compassion. They saw him as the God who is in direct and intimate personal relationship and communion with his saints and devotees on whom he is pleased to shower his bountiful love and goodness. These blessed men found themselves subdued and conquered by Love Divine. In deep veneration and gratitude they praised and worshipped him. This wondrous love and its power

mightily inspired them and from their joyful hearts came soul-lifting lyrics.

We find Māṇikkavācakar singing 'O Love Divine, O the bliss of my soul!'. His poetry is but the virtual opening of his heart and soul in rapturous praise and adoration. He committed his life fully to God - in worshipping and serving Him. From his spiritual experience, he says that the more a person savours God's love and his grace, the more his love for God wells up in his heart. Divine worship and adoration are his supreme delight. As the ties that bind the saints to God become stronger and tighter, God becomes all in all to them and nothing in this mortal life matters to them.

Deeply touched by Gods's infinite love and compassion for him, *Appar* exclaims, 'O my Lord, thou art my father, my mother, my kith and kin and my all!. O my wealth inexhaustible, priceless pearl, gold and precious sapphire! O Infinite treasure, foundation of riches and my supreme bliss!'. *Vaḷḷalār* 's poetry spills over with rapturous praise and adoration. He calls God 'The mighty mountain whom love can hold in its resistless grip!. The gracious king, who has chosen to take abode even in my lowly heart. The mighty Lord who is readily ensnared by the silken bonds of love and kindness'. *Tāyumāṉavar* also lifts his heart and soul in grateful praise and thanks and affirms that he owes his very breath and his very life to Gods's mercy and protection.

The saints and devotees resound to God's love with longing hearts and it is their supreme delight. They find God, his love and comfort, great, refreshingly sweet and full of power. They all affirm with one accord that Divine Love is a perennial stream that

ceaselessly flows and overflows; its power and pull none can resist.

This is the love that subdues and conquers. This is not a mere abstract idea but the actual spiritual experience in the lives of saints and devotees who were willing receptacles of the peace and supreme joy which God alone can bestow.

Their spiritual experiences have been recorded with clarity and in great detail in the sacred books of Saivite literature. The miracle which happens in the life of the individual touched and illuminated by God's love and its splendour, is a favourite theme of Saivite saints, and in glorious verse they have expressed its wonder mystery. 'O wonder of wonders, that the mighty God, the monarch of the universe, the great creator should condescend to shower his bountiful love on this lowly man!'. They have always been conscious of man's unworthiness, which finds repeated expression in the songs of *Tiruvācakam* and *Tēvāram*. The expressions 'Even me, wretched me!, Even, me, lowly and contemptible; even me, the castaway!' are typical examples worthy of note. *Māṇikkavācakar, Suntarar* and *Vaḷḷalār*, each in his own unique way, bear testimony in inimitable poetry to the manner in which God's wondrous love relentlessly pursued and pulled them and completely subdued and conquered them.

The God who subdues and conquers his devotees by the power of his irresistable love is also found to be sweet and endearing, as personally known and experienced by these blessed men. Innumerable are the songs they have sung hailing God as 'Sweet honey, heavenly nectar, delicious ambrosia' etc. etc. Saivite

saints have sung with perfect unanimity that Divine Love is 'Love that is indescribably sweet, the love that continually feeds and nourishes with unsatiating bliss and joy'. In this regard, the songs of *Tiruvācakam* may be specially mentioned. In these glorious verses the infinite great and gracious love of God are vividly and magnificently portrayed. The poetic style and versification are of such excellence that these sacred songs exude the fragrance of divinity itself and we seem to savour the ambrosia of God's love to the utmost. Tamil Saivite Literature is rich in such devotional poetry. To read and sing these songs of praise is rich and rewarding experience by itself. Their sweet melody and divine message are delightful to hear; they deeply stir our minds and our very souls, flooding our entire being with unspeakable joy. Pious and dedicated people feel sure and certain that there could exist not a single person with heart and soul so dead and insensitive as not to be touched and charmed by the sweetness and heart-warming power of these songs.

The Saivite saints have also treated divine love in another dimensions in their poetry. The man-woman love, the husband-wife love, the love between the spouse and his espoused - (*Talaivaṉ* and *Talaivi*) is the deepest and the most emotion-filled experience that can be thought of in man's earthly life. The Saivite poets have taken this love relationship to the highest spiritual plane in their poetry, divesting it of its physical and worldly sensuality. They have composed poems based on *Akapporuḷ* (love theme) and endeavoured to praise and glorify God depicting him as the Divine Spouse (*Talaivaṉ*) and his adoring and faithful devotee as the loved one, his beloved (*Talaivi*). ***Vaḷḷalār*** has composed many poems in this model and they are supremely

delectable; they give us a foretaste of the peace, serenity and heavenly joy that only God's immediate presence can provide. One of them runs as follows:

'O my gracious Lord, O Heavenly Light,
Thou art my loving husband!
When I your fair golden frame embrace,
All darkness flees; there is no more caste or tribe!
O your dazzling light, I see pervading everywhere!
You have lifted me from mine lowly estate;
Your blessed union with me fills me full!
With joy and bliss, O Lord I am one with Thee!'
God's love is love that subdues and conquers; it is also love that is sweet, winsome and endearing.
It is also love that enfolds, embraces and forgives.

God's forgiving love is a recurrent theme in Saivite poetry; it is vividly and elaborately dealt with by many eminent men of Saivism in their songs. When the devotees truly and sincerely represent their sins and shortcomings, confess them and offer their humble supplications and prayers to God, the Lord graciously forgives them and grants them full absolution. The saints have never ceased to wonder and exult in this forgiving love of God and their response is one of heartfelt gratitude and abundant joy. They have been fully conscious that they are miserable sinners and that their corrupt and tainted condition has rendered them utterly unworthy in the eyes of God. Many are the evils and misdeeds that they have committed in their lives; and many are the acts of goodness and charity that they failed to do. The repentant devotees think of their wickedness with

remorse and sorrow and they feel utterly miserable. They shudder to think of the majesty, the holiness and the spotless purity of God. It is their inner pain and agony that has found expression in their songs, which are literally tearful cries of anguish and grateful prayers raised to heaven. The glory and the splendour of true repentance and the transformed life have been vividly portrayed in these songs. *Māṇikkavācakar, Appar, Suntarar, , Paṭṭiṉattār* and *Vaḷḷalār* bear testimony in their songs to God's forgiving and absolving love which they have received and enjoyed in full measure in their lives. They testify to God's love that forgives, makes good all our needs and deficiencies and grants new life, unceasing joy and supreme bliss.

In *Tiruviḷaiyāṭalpurāṇam,* there is an important chapter entitled *'Mā Pādakam tīrtta Paṭalam'* which is worthy of study and reflection. It brings out how God is infinitely loving, merciful and compassionate towards repentant sinners whom he graciously pardons and cleanses even from the vilest of sins. The man referred to, which is guilty not only of patricide but also of the most depraved form of incest, comes after some time under the benign influence of righteous men. He feels the pangs of sin and guilt. He shudders to think of his own utterly despicable and tainted state. Who will lift him from this abysmal condition - from the relentless and ever-haunting nightmare of self-accusation and mental agony? He cannot think of any little thing of his merit that can even remotely render him worthy of God's pity and mercy. He breaks down in true and heartfelt repentance and tears and he raises his fervent pleadings and supplications to God. Who else can grant him true repose and peace? Lord Siva, the God of infinite love and boundless mercy, not only graciously

forgives him but also designs to accept him as his favoured devotee.

Then there is the account of how Lord Siva's neck became blackened in one noble and gracious gesture in response to the prayers and entreaties of the gods. The glory and magnitude of his love is such that he not only responds and submits to the prayers and petitions of those who seek him diligently and trustingly, but he also takes upon himself all their troubles and sufferings and all the evils that menance them.

The *Devas* (gods) began churning the Sea of Milk (*pāṟkaṭal*) using a huge mountain as churn-staff and a monstrous snake as churning rope. They hoped to draw out *Dēvāmirtam* (divine nectar) - from the sea by means of their labours. But much to their consternation, the deadly venoms came out in foaming billows after billows from the deep sea threatening to destroy the gods outright and annihilate the entire world. This emerging holocaust should be stopped then and there if disaster were to be averted. The gods fled in utter despair and panic to Lord Siva and fell at his feet crying for instant succour. How could he permit his beloved creation to come to such an ignominious destruction? He immediately swallowed the entire venom (*Āalakālam*) in one mighty gulp and retained it in his neck, which in consequence became blackish blue. On account of this Lord Siva came to be known by the special name, *Nilakaṇṭaṉ* (Blue throated one).

To look upon this episode as mere mythology or as something that happened in the remote past or in primordial times, would be to miss its significance and the irrefutable fact of

Gods infinite love and his mighty cleansing power which washes away and wiped out all the accumulated sins, corruption and depravity of man and the world. It is in this spirit and conviction that the noted Tamil writer, thinker and Saivite scholar *Tiru. Vi. Ka.* cries out, 'O gracious Lord of Love and mercy, thou hast consumed all the venom of my sins so that I may taste and drink the heavenly nectar of thy love and grace!'. He is the God who consumes the deadly venom of our vilest sins and offers to his devotees the sweet, vivifying honey of his bountiful love and grace.

God's greatness is manifest not only by his subduing, conquering and enfolding love but also in his outpouring grace. His grace is the outcome of His supreme love and His love is dynamic action. Saivism sees God as the Lord who acts in five different dimensions or capacities. He is the one who creates, preserves, destroys and shelters and also manifests himself in abundant grace. Lord Siva performs all these functions in company with the help of Sakti. Sakthi is grace itself, nothing different. The word combinations *Siva-Sakti, Paramasivaṉ-Pārvati,* and *Ammai-Appar,* are special names of Lord Siva and they convey the great truth of the duality of his being and functioning. Just as the sun and its rays, Siva and Sakti exist unitedly and they are inseparable. 'There is no Sivam without Sakti and no Sakti without Sivam', affirms Aruḷnanti Sivāccāriyār.

Lord Siva appears as Nataraja and this point out the five-fold functions of God. Lord Nataraja known also as *Ampalavāṇaṉ Kūttapirāṉ* and *Tāṇṭavarāyaṉ* dances majestically and imperiously and in this way he demonstrates how he creates all the worlds, protects, destroys and coneals them and also holds

them in His boundless grace. Lord Siva in his representation as Nataraja appears with three hands and two legs. In one hand he carries his drum and it symbolises that he is the God who creates. His second hand is the hand of triumph that protects and offers refuge. The third hand which carries fire shows that he is the God who destroys. It is the representation of his unchallengeable power of destruction. One of his legs rests on the earth which shows that he is the God who conceals and shelters. The other leg which he keeps raised in an uplifted posture shows his abundant grace; the grace that is continually active.

With his hand carrying the drum, he removes and casts away all vanities and false hold; with his hand carrying fire he burns and destroys all evil, sin and corruption; this fire is all-consuming and its cleansing power spares nothing that is wicked, sinful and impure. With his foot on the earth he keeps under check all moral depravity and degradation from getting the upper hand. With his raised feet, he offers grace and succour in boundless measure to all who come to him in full trust and surrender. His hand is outstretched in endearing love and compassion which floods the soul with unspeakable joy. 'This is how the manner and rhythm of the Lord my Father's holy dance appeals to me and touches my very soul', claims the author of *'Uṇmai neṟi viḷakkam'*, a philosophical text of Saiva Siddhanta.

The dance that Lord Siva dances in his holy temple at Chitamparam is one that goes on also in perfect harmony in all the created worlds and heavens and in the five elements; it is the dance of gracious love. The same holy dance of Lord Nataraja goes on in sweet and divine harmony in the saint's heart and soul, the

symbolic Ciṟṟampalam (The ethereal stage) of every devotee and saint. The old saying, 'Nothing moves, not even an atom except by God's authority' eloquently brings out the power and the deep significance of this holy and graceful dance of Lord Nataraja. *Tirumūlar* says: ' Lord Nataraja's gracious dance of power, love and compassion goes on not only in the entire universe of his creation but also in mortal flesh - the hearts and minds of his loved and favoured ones'. He sings:

'The Lord's holy presence everywhere; Siva-Sakti everywhere
The whole universe is Chitamparam; everywhere his holy dance;
Lord Siva pervading all worlds and heavens!
Your omnipresent grace O God, your gracious dance thus declares!'

The devotees of Lord Siva have this sure conviction in their hearts and souls and it fills them with rapture and joy. It is how they have always seen and have been deeply moved by God's dharsan (vision) at the temple at Chitamparam. In glorious songs and lyrics they have given expression to this sublime experience felt and enjoyed in the inmost depths of their hearts and souls. It is the spontaneous outflow of their gratitude and joy. They all affirm with one accord that wherever we witness dance, rhythm, movement, dynamism and upsurge, we find manifested the Lord's glorious dance of grace and abiding love.

Saivism believes that the five-fold functions of God are not only the manifestations of divine grace; it is also the manifestation of divine righteousness (dharma). He loves and subdues his

devotees by his love; He embraces and graciously protects them; he enriches them by his outpouring grace. This is not all. He defends and preserves righteousness, justice and virture. He is the perfect administrator of justice and equity. According to , *Aruḷnanti Sivāccāriyār* the law of Karma emanates from the background of this truth - the infallibility of Divine Law and Justice.

God's love is blended with justice. That is why in addition to His being represented by the forms of *Bhogi* and *Yogi* (*Umā Mahēsvara* and *Dakshināmūrti*), he has also been represented in the kamari form (the hideous visage, terrifying face).This hideous face of God is symbolic of divine anger, its enormity and fierce-power. He does not countenance sin and evil. Divine justice and retribution is sure and certain. God punishes his creatures to the extent befitting their sins and misdeeds. He is loving, merciful and gracious; but his wrath against sin and wickedness is too dreadful to contemplate. This is what his hideous face indicates. Karma is not capable of acting independently on its own; in itself there is no power. Devoid of intelligence and knowledge, Karma is just one of the *mummalams* - the three impurities inherent in the soul. It is but an instrument in the hands of God and he wields it in the manner befitting his righteousness and justice. The power of Karma resembles that of an arrow shot from a bow. Unless someone using a bow aims and shoots it, an arrow cannot by itself spring forth and hit. Similarly it is God who uses and operates Karma to promote his purpose and mission. He is loving, gracious and full of compassion; at the same time he upholds justice and righteousness and He subjects his creatures to the law of Karma.

There is no way of triumphing over the Law of Karma except by submitting to it. Therein lies the path to spiritual and ethical growth and progress. This is the basic Saivite doctrine. Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran explains this point very effectively; he cites the analogy of a man proceeding on a sea voyage. He is likely to be afflicted by sea-sickness. What can he do to prevent it? There is no alternative open to him except to continue the voyage.

Further, the Bishop categorically affirms:'Nowhere in Saivite Theology (Saivite Siddhanta) is it sated that divine grace abrogates or over-rules the Law of Karma. On the other hand, God's grace operates in and through Karma thereby fulfilling the law'.

The resplendent God - corporeal, incorporeal and incorporeal yet corporeal

Saivism visualises and worships God attributing three characteristics to him - that is to say: having form, formless and formless and yet having form. The formless God means that his form cannot be seen by eyes. We are unable to see him with our physical sense of sight. God also manifests himself in visible form - as a rational or irrational being and in male or female gender. The corporeal yet incorporeal God means that he can manifest himself also in a visible form which is however beyond the concepts of male and female gender and also of rationality and irrationality.

God manifesting himself as Nataraja clearly shows him as God with a form. *Sivalinkam* indicates the incorporeal yet corporeal state of God. God's formlessness consists in *Sivam, Sakti, Natam* and *Vintu.* The Sivalinkam that represents God Siva in Saivite temples symbolises his revelation of himself in the non-corporeal yet corporeal state. There is no basis whatever in the

books on Saivism to substantiate the view that the Sivalinkam represented the phallus. It would be quite appropriate to say that the Sivalinkam is a symbol of transcendence - transcending the concepts of gender (masculinity and feminity), of corporeality and non-corporeality and of rationality and irrationality. It is said that Lord Siva appeared as a burning flame of light and granted visions to Brahma and Vishnu and that the Sivalinkam is a symbol demonstrating this condescending gesture of Lord Siva. There are many sacred songs in Saivism which bear testimony to the pre-eminent place which the Sivalinkam occupies in all Saivite temples and also to the primacy and reverence accorded to it in divine worship. Appar treats the human body with great sanctity and in one of his songs, he praises its role in inspiring verse. He says that the body is God's holy temple and the mind is Linkam. In this song Appar virtually dedicates his body to Lord Siva as his dwelling place where the linkam of mind is installed.

Tirumūlar observes that the 'Sivalinkam always points towards God; the nanti i.e. the image of a bull set up in front of the temple is symbolic of the soul and the altar of sacrifice represents the place in the temple where Pāsam the three impurities are completely got rid of. The saints are in various stages of growth in their devotional life and spiritual experience and God manifests himself to each of them according to merit - as a corporeal or non-corporeal or as a corporeal and yet non-corporeal God. Yet God is not confined to any of these forms. He is the perfect and supreme God, transcending all these three forms. Even the saints cannot know and comprehend him fully. Those who play and swim in the sea know only its surface but do they know the immensity of its depth and breadth? We are in a

similar predicament regarding our knowledge of God. This analogy is given in *Tirukkaḷirruppaṭiyār* one of the fourteen texts of Saiva Siddhanta. Saivism emphasizes the sublime truth that God stoops to conform himself to our limited understanding and intelligence and he functions within that framework.

Human birth worth aspiring - The Doctrines of Man, Sin and Salavation

Saivism accords a high place to man, his unique character and attributes and his activities and involvements in this earthly life; it holds him with great reverence. Appar has expressed his conviction that human birth in this earth is something worth aspiring.

Saivism has very clearly and elaborately described man as he is in his natural state as well as in his state of dependence. God the Supreme Being and intelligence has been existing everlastingly without any beginning; similarly the lives in this world have been existing without a beginning. These lives are infinite in number. However, it should be clearly understood that though just like God they have no beginning, they are by no means equal to God. Thus God has been accorded a supreme and exalted status in Saivite thought and theology. God and all living beings are interdependent. This is beautifully expressed in Saivite thought. God's activity is not independent of the lives of his creation. St. Augustine categorically affirms that we cannot accomplish anything except through God and God does not and will not anything except through us. This truth of God-man interdependence has its place in Saivite theology also. It will be a

negation of truth to say that man is free from the stain of sin and corruption. By his very nature he is sinful and he is entangled in sin. This has been clearly stated in Saivism.

The living beings always resemble and conform to whatever or whomever they choose as the object of their dominant desire. When they fix their minds on God and choose to depend on him entirely, they closely resemble God. When they are drawn to this world, they are ensnared in its ties and bonds and they find themselves in the stage of bondage. The ideal or supreme good for living beings in this earthly existence is to cast off their ambivalence i.e. seeking to serve God and the world at the same time. When they unreservedly depend on God and get united to him, they attain supreme bliss - the incomparable joy which God alone can give.

The French philosopher Rousseau said 'Man is born free, but he is in chains everywhere'. God alone is without bondage. Hence he is called as Kantaḻi and *Kaṭavuḷ*.

Humans are in a pitiable state. They live in this world without being able to know what it is that holds them in bondage. Saivism emphasizes this ignorance which humankind is suffering from. Human beings are shackled by the three types of bond, which are defined by the single comprehensive term pācam (attachment). The Chief and the most pernicious of these three types is āṇavam (egoism). It is the evil principle connected with the soul from eternity. It has always held man relentlessly under bondage, clouding his vision and shutting him off from the light of true self-knowledge and wisdom. Just like husk covering the grain

of paddy and like the rust that spreads over copper, the blight of egoism - arrogance and self-importance encrusts the human mind and soul. Saivism does not minimise this malignancy of the soul. It calls it *sin* and nothing short of it. The relevent verse in *Nantiyupatēca Paṭalam* mentions the typical qualities of the ego centred soul. Egoism perverts every thought, word and deed of the man whom it holds in its power. Such a man is quite incapable of thinking rightly, speaking discreetly and acting widely. All his thoughts, words and deeds are perverse and wicked. Egoism is worse than darkness. Darkness hides all other objects but it at least keeps itself visible, whereas egoism in a man shuts all other persons and other living beings cuts off his consideration and it also keeps itself hidden and unseen. But the saints are aware of the pitfalls of the ego-centred life and they eagerly long to be liberated from its stranglehold. *Tāyumāṉavar* bitterly laments the dilemma of his own condition of his soul being torn by two opposing forces, God and the ego. In his song he expresses his deep yearning for the day when he would whole heartedly align himself with God and in the same breath he affirms with solemn certainty that this glorious liberation is possible through God's abundant grace. Egoism, this insidious evil which slowly and relentlessly leads the soul to its doom, completely vanishes before the power of God's grace, just as the coating of rust on copper is completely dissolved and obliterated by mercury. It should however be pointed out that egoism or ego-centredness in man does not perish; but it exists as an eternal entity and God uses it for his purpose and for the ultimate benefit of the individual or the living being concerned. The story of *Sūrapaṉmaṉ* in *Kanta purāṇam* is a classical example. *Sūrapaṉmaṉ* by bitter experience comes to know of the high cost of egoism. God thwarts him in his

nefarious endeavours; but he grants his request and transforms him to a peacock to be used as his vehicle (mayil vākanam). *Sūrapanman* is the representative and the personification of egoism, the worst of the three evil principles or passions that relentlessly plague the soul in its pilgrimage, towards spiritual perfection and salvation.

The second of the bondages or evil principles that afflicts the soul is karmam. Saivism believes that the living beings of God's creation are capable of behaving and acting in two different ways. Their nature and activate are of two different kinds or qualities - the good and the bad or the virtuous and the vicious. It is the Lord's good pleasure to help them on their spiritual pilgrimage towards supreme bliss. As this onward journey proceeds, along the way they reap the rewards of their virtuous or wicked actions as the case may be. Each of God's created lives have to go through seven different kinds of births; in other words, they have to assume seven different body-forms in which they are destined to meet and experience the consequences of their Karmam. These seven births according to Saivite belief are: Devas (gods), human birth (man and woman), beasts, birds, acquatic being, reptiles and trees (plant life).

God alone can correctly identify good and evil, assess them righteously and he alone possesses perfect knowledge regarding their nature. As such he uses them as standards of merit for giving what they deserve to the living beings of his creation. The eminent Saivites *Māṇikkavācakar* and *Paṭṭinattār* were strongly influenced by the Saivite doctrine of rebirth. They firmly believed in it and they have expressed their conviction in a very appealing and heartwarming manner in their songs. The great Tamil poetical

work *Tirukkural* also contains verses, which corroborate the Saivite doctrine of rebirth. The righteous persons do not set their mind selfishly on rewards or benefits they choose to do good for the sake of righteousness and they refrain from wicked actions because they abhor evil.

Human beings give to themselves the utmost importance. The 'I' concept dominates. Man harbours the feeling that all his actions are of his own doing. This attitude serves to add more and more to his sins as well as to his good works. As he assumes different births in successive endeavours to get rid of sin and wickedness, his actions and their consequences go on accruing. This is inevitably happening as the soul proceeds in its spiritual pilgrimage. As such the living beings are indispensably in need of many births.

When man knows himself correctly and comes to the true realisation that he is not the power behind all his actions, his sins and vileness cease to multiply and there comes an end to the process of accumulation of merits and demerits of his former births. Ultimately it is the infinitely wise and gracious God who liberates living beings from this whirlpool - the pursuing consequences of their actions, their Karma.

The Tamil luminary *Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar* has stated that when the sinner truly repents of his sins and misdeeds and when in sincere remorse and contrition he cries to God, his Father in agony and tears, his sins vanish; but persons with hardened and stubborn hearts and unrepentant minds should reap the consequences of their wickedness. True repentance and

remorse for one's sins and evil deeds lead to the most blessed experience and nothing is comparable to it. It touches and moves the very heart of God who is infinitely gracious and merciful. He showers His grace and blessings on the repentant sinner.

The extent and magnitude of sins and transgressions a person has committed may be great and terrifying. But they are not beyond the range of God's compassion and gracious pardon. The sinner has only to repent and cry to God for mercy and pardon and God removes all his sins, and destroys them. This is emphasized in Saivite belief and doctrine. A little spark of flame is enough to burn out and destroy a huge pile of firewood; an entire flock of crows perched on a tree, is put to flight outright just by flinging a small stone at them. In like manner, divine grace is supremely powerful and effective to get rid of all human sins and wickedness. *Appar* and *Tāyumāṉavar* have affirmed this sublime truth in unequivocal terms in their songs.

Adoring and praising Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram, *Sampantar* exclaims: 'O Lord, I am thy servant and thy slave! What can evil do unto me? What can sin and wickedness do unto me? No wickedness and corruption can prevail against me - I am thine own!'

The third of the bondages that shackle humankind is māyai. Though māya is one of the three evil passions or principles inherent in the human heart, it is not to be placed in the same category or level as egoism. To some extent it provides light to the soul and it is of some help to dispel the darkness of egoism.

Umāpati Sivāccāriyār illustrates this in his poetical work *Tiruvarutpayan* in a lucid manner. The analogy he makes use of is quite appropriate. A lamp is of use to us as long as night lasts and till the day dawns. The living beings of God's creation are in a similar situation. The darkness of egoism (self-centredness) is *holding them in bondage. Till this darkness completely leaves* them, māya subsisting as body (flesh) and the world, imparts true knowledge to them.

Māya is the origin and cause of the body and the world. The body and the world emanate from Māya. Māya consists of the body, the intellect, the world, worldly indulgences and enjoyments. These are necessary for the earthly creatures, as help to attain the stage of salvation. As such, they cannot be deemed as a bondage. They become a bondage only when they are treated as a means of sensual enjoyment and used for self-gratification. Saivism uses the multiple-term Dhanu-karaṇa-Bhuvana-Bhogam to describe māya (Body-sense-organs-enjoyment).

The eminent authority on Tamil Saivism, *Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar* describes māya in elaborate terms to bring out its purpose in Siva's cosmic plan. He identifies it with mother nature. He exclaims, 'O Mother Nature! You helped to bring me into existence. You co-exist with me as my body-the body which imparts knowledge and enlightenment to me and also provides me with sensual pleasures. O radiant beauty, you manifest yourself to me in myriad forms - the sun shining with dazzling light, the softly shining (silver) moon, the majestic mountains, the lovely and imposing waterfalls, the gardens and woods and fair flowers, the fair women, the fine arts, etc. etc. You delight me in infinite ways. You are my constant companion and my great helper. O,

Māya Devi, how can I say that you are only an illusion? It is you, O Mother that reveals to me your master and spouse - God the supreme reality! The life that I live is the life that you have bequeathed to me!' He affirms that heavenly bliss is the bliss blended in and flowing from Mother-Nature (Māya).

To think despairingly of the human body and to treat it as lowly and profane is completely alien to Saivite thought and doctrine. In fact, the body is intended to be of help in man's onward path to his salvation. Accordingly, Saivism emphasizes the need and the duty to take proper care of the body and to protect it from harm. In his Tirumantiram, *Tiṟumūlar* dwells on one's sacred duty to care for and protect the body.

It is a vital element in Saivite culture to consider the body as a holy temple, the adobe of God. We find that the architecture of Saivite temples have been designed to resemble the structure of human body. The Saivite in his body, in the body-mind-life-integration of his personality worships God and holds interior communion with Him. The former is known as *puṟa vaḻipāṭu* or *outward worship*; the latter is *aka vaḻipāṭu* or *interior adoration.* The words of St. Paul in the New Testament is relevant in this context; 'Your body is the temple of God'. The Saivite saint Appar expresses the same truth in his own way. He speaks of the body as a holy temple, the mind as the slave of God, truth as holiness ………; the pure heart the Sivalinkam. The body is sacred; it has a divine purpose. *Tirumūlar* in his beautiful verse lays emphasis on the sanctity of the body. He says:

'The heart is God's holy temple; this fleshy body His worthy abode;
To men of true vision, this life the true Sivalinkam!
To noble magnanimous men, the mouth is God's sacred steeple, the entrance to His holy precints!
The beguiling senses, the shining lamps of radiant glory!'.

There are many Saivite songs and lyrics, which state in unmistakable terms that it is sinful and wicked to use the body and worldly things as a means to sensual gratification and carnal indulgence. These verses may appear to speak disparagingly of the body and the world. The underlying thought in these songs is that in our earthly life we should be free from egoism and selfishness and we should take proper care of our body. When *Tirumūlar* speaks of 'the beguiling senses' his intention is not to treat the senses as unclean or unholy by themselves, but to warn that unless we are vigilant, we will be deluded and misled by them. The poet's emphasis is on the beguiling nature of the senses. He condemns the human folly of falling a victim to the enticement of the senses. Such folly will lead to loss of mental and spiritual poise and to utter misery. Saivism exhorts its adherents to master their senses and to live a life of true bliss and freedom. Such a life, it says, is possible only when we live in communion with God and in accordance with the precepts of the Holy Scriptures.

In this context the manner in which the words, the flesh(sarx) the body (soma) and the world (cosmos) are used in the New Testament, is worth comparing.

In Luke 24:39, the word 'flesh' means the flesh constituting the body.

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself:
handle me and see;'

In 2 Corinthians 7:5, the word 'flesh' has been translated as 'body'.

In Romans 8:4, the word 'flesh' points to 'human nature'.

In 1 Corinthians10:3, the word 'flesh' is used in the sense of 'desire and attachments pertaining to our wordly life'.

Likewise in Matt. 6:2, the word 'flesh' stands for the human body, whereas in Colossians 2:11 the same word indicates 'the body of the sins of the flesh'.

We should understand these words and expressions correctly in their contexts and situations. Similarly, we should understand correctly the meaning of the word 'body' in the contexts in which it occurs in Tamil Saivite poetry. Saint Appar's song, 'Body the holy temple' and *Paṭṭiṉattār*'s song 'This body of flesh, this filthy cow-house ....' may be mentioned here as classical examples.

The body which God designed intended to be his holy temple is also prone to become 'a den of thieves' on account of the unbriddled onslaughts and allurements of the sense and the brazen selfishness and self-centredness.

In John 3:16, the word 'world' means human beings, and in 1 John 2:15 the same word stands for the manifold sins, wickedness and corruption that exist in the world. In like manner, the two expressions 'This beautiful world' and 'This Vanity Fair'

are used in Saivism to bring out two entirely different characteristics of the world.

The state of salvation: The living beings of this world are not free; they are hampered by various bonds and shackles. When they are liberated from them and when they come to God, they are stated to have reached the stage of salvation. Saivism exphasizes that this is possible only through the grace of God.

A beautiful illustration given by the Saivite philosopher, *Meykaṇṭār* will be helpful for a clear understanding of the Saivite belief regarding salvation. Early in his childhood, a young prince is kidnapped by forest hunters who carry him away into their jungle abode. He is brought up by them. He lives among them for some years and is quite unaware of his true identity. He practically becomes one of them adopting their habits, culture and life-style. Then one day the king, his father, happens to come along there. Delighted to find his son, he speaks to him in endearing terms, successfully disabuses the young man of his misconception and convinces him that in reality he is of royal birth and that he is a royal heir. It is an emotional experience, an occasion of exhilaration and joy. Enlightenment dawns and the prince, realising his true identity, sheds his old ways and his life among the hunters in the forest, and he returns to his rightful home - his palace to start a new life. When the soul in spite of its bonded state and the enticements of the world and the flesh, persists tenaciously in doing vicious acts, God graciously comes to him as his Guru (mentor) and says: 'O, you have hitherto been reared and misled by hunters, the five senses; you have not realised who you are in reality!' and instantly the soul is liberated

from the chains and fetters of the senses and it reaches the hallowed feet of the Lord. This is the Saivite view as enunciated by *Meykaṇṭār* in *Sivañana Pōtam.*

God's eternal concern for and His consistent involvement in the salvation of each and every soul is lucidly illustrated by *Kachiyappa Sivāccāriya Aṭikaḷār*, the author of Kanta *purāṇam* in the particular chapter of the book describing *Vaḷḷiyammai's* wedding. It is a story with great allegoric significance. *Vaḷḷi* is a maiden of divine birth. She is being brought up by the hunter-king, *Nampirāsan̲*. Lord Murukan̲ intends to marry her. A series of exciting episodes happens before he gets her hand and finally the holy wedding takes place. It is a decisive moment in *Vaḷḷi's* life when she comes to know of her true identity and great indeed is her joy. Also *Nampirāsan̲*, his household and the entire hunter-folk rejoice in this supremely happy and solemn turn of events. The author of *Kanta purāṇam* narrates this gracious and condescending act of God Murukan̲ beautifully and dramatically in his inimitable poetry. Here we recall in our minds the famous words of St. Augustine, 'O Lord you have created us for you; our hearts are restless until we come and rest in you'. The saint expresses the deep longing of the human soul. Apart from God, there is nowhere man can turn to, to find true peace, tranquility of soul and ultimate salvation.

Many are the ways by which Lord Siva in his gracious love and magnanimity chose to inetervene personally and admit some of his favoured devotees and saints into true bliss and salvation. When the living beings cast off their arrogance and egoism, they attain the mature stage and God's abundant grace is available to

them. They should cease to harbour the feelings that they themselves are the motive force behind their actions and they should cease to be concerned about the rewards and consequences of their actions. They should consider themselves as merely God's servants and slaves, and live in complete dependence on Him. It is at this stage that God appears as their Guru and admits them into supreme bliss.

In the case of Suntarar, Lord Siva appeared as a Brahmin on the day of his (Suntarar's) wedding and took him aside into his bliss. Similarly he appeared as a Brahmin and took both *Tirunīlakaṇṭa Nāyaṉār* and his wife into his presence and bestowed salvation on them. Lord Siva came in the guise of a hermit and granted salvation to *Iḷayāṉkuṭi Māṟa Nāyaṉār* and his wife. He emerged dramatically from the Sivalinkam in his temple to grant favour to *Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār*. When *Tirunāvukkaracar* was starving pitiably and there was no one to give him food, Lord Siva deigned to appear as a Brahmin and served delicious rice to the saint, and again in the company of his spouse *Umaiyāḷ* he appeared in vision to him at Tiruvaiyāṟu. Innumerable are the ways by which Siva acts decisively in favour of his beloved ones who have risen in his estimation in their ascent to spiritual progress and to the stage of salvation. Such decisive acts of God occur in different settings of their lives and He showers His grace on them. These are all narrated in detail in the sacred books of Saivism.

The lives of these illustrious persons who found favour with God, their mental and spiritual state, the great events and occasions in their lives and their selfless service and usefulness

are indeed marvellous and we are filled with admiration and deep reverence for them.

These are the devotees who are completely free from the shackle of the self - the ego principle. They are devoid of the primacy of the self. Fully emancipated, they have attained a high state of ethical perfection. They delight in servicce, in serving and helping others without looking for any recompense whatever. The all-consuming passion in their lives is to love and serve God; but their love and service is not one that expects or desires any reward or favour in return. This is the perfection in love - the outpouring love of God that always gives and does not receive anything in return. This is the perfection in love - the outpouring love of God that always gives and does not receive anything in return. Their love is centred entirely on God and they seek him and him alone. The extent of their piety and devotion surpasses our understanding. With his soul full of adoration and praise, *Māṉikkavācakar* sings: 'O, I desire thee and thee alone; even Hell I shall shun not, provided thou are there with me!.' Also another great saint of Vaishnavism, *Toṇṭaraṭipoṭi Āḻvār* singing in a similar vein, says that even if he is offered equality with Indra the King of the devas and the privilege of ruling in Indra's domain, he would have none of it, and that all he desires is the blessed company of the Lord Vishnu and supreme joy of living in communion with Him.*Rabia*, a devout Muslim mystic belonging to the Sufi sect, cries out, 'O Lord, I love and adore thee alone. I desire nothing else; if even I worship thee out of fear of being thrown into hell, I implore thee to destroy me in that very hell-fire!'.

These saints of God have already attained the stage of salvation in this earthly life. They are always absorbed in thoughts of God and of things divine. Their supreme happiness consists in contemplation of God and of God's love and grace. Even when God does not grant their petitions and even when he does not protect them from troubles and trials, these bhaktas do not flinch in their love for God and in their devotion and loyalty to him. They stand steadfast in their devotion and in their pious contemplation of him. The verse of *Kāraikkālammaiyār* is a true picture of the staint's mind and her love of God. She says, 'It does not matter if the Lord does not remove my troubles and my sorrows; it does not matter if he does not show me the path I should tread. I have dedicated myself, heart and soul, to him. How can I refrain from loving Him?' The saints derive supreme joy in meditating on God and also in serving him with dedication. These are the persons who have reached the zenith in the seal of perfection in divine love. In Saivite Theology, they have been designated as *Nāyaṉmārkaḷ*, His chosen ones or the elite in God's favour so to say.

These saints who are aware of their holy mission in this earthly life, love God and the living beings which are his creation, and hold them with deep reverence. If at all they are in possession of wealth and worldly riches, they do not use them for self-gratification or for indulging in sensual pleasure; they use their gold, money and all their wordly possessions to feed the poor and the hungry and also to help and serve the devotees and saints of God. They stand apart as a class by themselves. Courage, wisdom and humility are the hall-marks that characterise all their thoughts, words and deeds. Saivism believes that friendship of the

saints and association with them are blessed privileges in our lives and they are worthy of being earnestly sought after and aspired for.

The saints and devotees of God who have chosen to tread the path of salvation and love of God are always amazed by his infinite love and grace and they continually praise and worship him with grateful hearts. They are deeply humble and they consider themselves quite unworthy of God's love and mercy. They confess their sins and shortcomings to God with contrite hearts. The Saivite Saints *Appar, Suntarar, Sampantar, Māṇikkavācakar , Paṭṭiṉattār and Vaḷḷalār* looked upon themselves as utterrly despisable and guilty of all the sins in human nature - avarice, selfishness, concupiscence, etc. In their songs, and lyrics praising God, we find that they always looked back with a deep sense of humility on their sinful past and the thoughts and attitudes of their earlier lives. They are filled with exultation and they are amazed at the glorious light that God has graciously shed in their lives. They are rapturous over the radiant newness into which they have come, after God's love and mercy have won them over.

It is quite appropriate to recall here, the beautiful saying, 'There is no saint without a past and no sinner without a future'.

The nearer the saints come to God, the more they realise how great and holy He is and how utterly corrupt and sinful they themselves are. It is in this spirit that St. Paul, the great apostle of God, cries out in anguish, 'O, miserable man that I am; who will free me from this wretched and sinful body of mine!' and he

calls himself 'the chief among the sinners'. Similarly *Tirunavukkaracar*, *Paṭṭiṉattār* , *Vaḷḷalār* and others humbled themselves to the uttermost in the sight of God. In deep humility and introspection they felt that they were guilty of all the sins, wickedness and corruption that are natural to man. This reflected in the praise and the songs they raise to God entreating Him for mercy and forgiveness. *Paṭṭiṉattār* cries out, 'Lord I am wicked; I have strayed from the path of righteousness and virtue; I am a slave of the senses; I am ignorant, unlettered and I am a liar. I have been lacking in love and devotion for thee. O, I am wretched; why were I born in this world?' *Vaḷḷalār* 's agonising cry moves us deeply. 'O Lord, unless you forgive me, how can I move and live among humankind? O God, have mercy on me! I am undone!' We really wonder how these great and holy men of God could be such damned sinners as they call themselves to be.

These men are great, noble and magnanimous. Tender love for humanity and deep humility characterise their outlook and demeanour. They bear calumny with calm equanimity and they consider the faults and misdeeds of others as their own. They think themselves as sinful and utterly without any merit. They never desire to appear as righteous in the sight of God. They never consider themselves as more virtuous or holier than others. They judge themselves as belonging to the ranks of the sinners - even the vilest of them. In social life and in their attitude towards their fellowmen we discern their corporate spirit. It is not in their nature to criticise or accuse when they find evil and wicked men in society. They are firmly of the view that we should always

consider the sins and misdeeds of others as our own. Such is the nobility of their character. In all their prayers and entreaties to God, they emphasize the truth that all of us without a simple exception stand in need of honest self-examination and introspection regarding our ethical and spiritual condition. *Prof. V.A. Devasenapati* has described the self-knowledge and humility of the Saivite saints in a very lucid manner. In his book of **Human Bondage and Divine Grace** he says: 'The saints in their large-heartedness, blame themselves for the faults of others and indirectly show the need for self-examination.

These saints have already come up to the worthy state of salvation. By virtue of their spiritual experience, they are in the stage of becoming inseparably one with God. This is enunciated in the Saivite doctrine. But the way saints get united into God is not analogous to the way the waters of a river flow into the sea and get completely and irretrievably mixed up and lost in the surging and mighty waters of the ocean. The created lives when they become one with God, retain their individual personalities and maintain their separate identities. This is the firm and clear belief that Saivism upholds. The saints remain always the beloved servants and favoured ones of God. Even while God transforms the saints into his own likeness, He keeps them subordinate to him and they continue to be his loyal devotees, serving and adoring Him.

In this manner, the saints of God become one with him without losing their individual personal identities. The question then arises whether they in this beatific status still retain their consciousness of 'I' - the thought and awareness of self? This is a

pertinent question. But here we should remember that the arrogance of the ego - the preseumptuousness of the 'I concept - is entirely different from the true and wholesome knowledge one has of oneself. The blessed ones of God who have been united unto Him, are not dominated by the 'I' or the ego principle. Their lives become entirely God-centred.Their one consistent attitude is 'Henceforth it is no longer I but Thee, O Lord'. This is also their constant and continuous awareness and experience. The clear distinction between the perverse nature of egoism and the blessed state of the God-centred ego is expressed precisely by *Dr.V.A.Devasenapati* and it is relevant to quote his words here: 'egoism is pernicious because it is ego-centred. But when the ego or the self is God-centred, then it is fulfilment of the ego. The congnitive, conative and affective functions of the soul are all God-centred. It is such a fulfilment that we find in the lives of the saints. The saints exemplify a successful pilgrimage from ego-centric existence to theo-centric existence'. The transformation of the self from the ego-centric state to the theo-centric state is a miracle that can happen only through the grace of God. It is his mercy and supervening grace alone that can liberate man from the bonds that ensnare and enslave him, break all the shackles that fetter him, and bestow on him the supreme bliss of becoming united unto himself.

It is indeed the greatest blessing and the perfect joy to be transformed by God into his likeness and becoming united unto him so as to become one with Him. This is the state of perfection which every soul has to strive for. How is one to become worthy of this supreme favour of God? There is only one way - the path of love. Saivism affirms this in clearest terms.

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THE TRANSCENDING MESSAGE OF RAMALINGA SWAMY

I

A REVOLUTIONARY THINKER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Chidambaram Ramalinga Swamy who lived in the nineteenth century is acknowledged to be an outstanding saint and poet of Tamil Nadu. He has distinguished himself both as a revolutionary thinker and as a reformer. His main contribution to the religious life of the Tamils is his concept of *Suddha Sanmārga* or *The True Path.* It points to a way of life, which transcends the conventional patterns of religion. Ramalinga claims this path as being distinct from and higher than the Saiva Siddhanta concept of *Sanmārga*[1] as well as from the *Samarasa Sanmārga* or equality of all religions propagated in Tamil Nadu, chiefly by the Saiva saint *Tāyumānavar.*

The Swamy made the ideals of *Jīvakāruṇyam* (charity towards all beings) and *Āṉmanēya Orumaippāṭu* (oneness of the souls of all beings) the basis of his new path. Stressing the importance of these spiritual virtues he condemned the evils of casteism and religious bigotry. He considered them to be the main hindrances for Suddha *Sanmārga.* No one has ever preached so vehemently against the evils of casteism and religious bigotry as Ramalinga, excepting perhaps Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, the leader of the Dravida Kazhagam. Ramalinga's writings have been a source of inspiration to several of the reformers who came after him to fight against these evils in Tamil Nadu.

It is interesting to note that Ramalinga was a contemporary of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Unlike those men, Ramalinga hailed from the non-Brahmin circle. Like Dayananda and Paramahamsa, Ramalinga had no English education. He was well versed in Tamil and the bulk of his writings is in verse form. The support and sympathy of the public in the case of Ramalinga were not so strong as in the case of the northern reformers. Further, Ramalinga's name has not received recognition outside Tamil Nadu. His writings, with the exception of a few poems, are yet to be rendered in English and other languages.

In the Line of the Saiva Saints and Siddhas

It is important to view the life and work of the Swamy within the framework of Tamil Saivism. The origin of Saivism in Tamil Nadu is traced back to very early times. One of the terms used to denote god in *Tolkāppiyam*,[2] the most ancient available grammar of Tamil, is Kantaḻi . It means 'One who is free from bonds'. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Tamils of that period were familiar with the Saiva concept of human bondage. There are clear evidences in the *Cankam* literature (*circa* 100 B.C. to 200 A.D.) for the existence of the cult of Siva. In *Cilappatikāram*, an epic poem written during this period, Lord Siva is referred to as 'the great one who is free from birth'.[3]

It was in the sixth century that Saivism gained momentum in Tamil Nadu. It became so powerful as to suppress the growth of Jainism and Buddhism. The most able exponents of Saivism during this period were Saint *Tirumūlar* and Saint *Tirunāavukkaracar*. *Tirumūlar*'s *Tirumantiram* is a great work of mystical wisdom. It consists of a little over three thousand

stanzas. *Tirumūlar*, in this monumental work of his, deals with the fundamental doctrines of Siddhanta, together with their ethical implications. *Tirunāvukkaracar* also known as *Appar* has sung a number of lyrical poems in various metres. These are complied together. The compilation is known as the *Tēvāram of Tirunāvukkaracar*. Both the saints have expressed their mature thoughts about the oneness of the human race. They have condemned the evils of casteism and religious superstition. They have insisted on the worship of God in spirit and truth. The love of God and the love of fellowmen are emphasized in their writings to a great extent.

During the following three centuries saints like *Sampantar, Suntarar* and *Māṇikkavacakar* made their valuable contributions to Saivite devotional literature.

In the later part of the history of Saivism in Tamil Nadu, the Siddhhas had an important role to play. The Siddhas were people who were bestowed with *siddhis* or extraordinary powers. The Siddhas (Cittars) of Tamil Nadu were noted for their ability to perform miracles in the service of society. Their songs became popular among the masses. They have protested against the traditional mode of worship and religious observances. They were often mistaken for atheists and agnostics. But they have never deviated from the fundamental beliefs of Saivism. *Tirumūlar* himself is said to have been a Siddha. Among the Siddhas, *Paṭṭinattār, Pattirakiriyār,Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar, Iṭaikkaṭṭu Cittar, Akappēy Cittar* and *Sivavākkiyar* are the more famous ones. The Siddhas are compared to the Sufis and the Gnostics.[4]

Saint Ramalinga was born and brought up in Saivism. He was greatly influenced by the lives and writings of the Saiva saints

as well as the Siddhas. He acknowledges in his writings that he had accepted Sampantar as his guru. He has paid tributes to other saints as well. He has followed their line of thought in his compositions. He was immensely influenced by the *Tiruvācakam* of *Māṇikkavācakar*. He has written six cantos following the pattern of *Māṇikkavācakar* and has given the same titles given in *Tiruvācakam*.[2]

The influence of the Siddhas on the life of Ramalinga was also great. He is reported to have performed some miracles. Like several other Siddhas he was very much concerned about the glorious life without death. He was conscious of the fact that he was unmistakably in the line of the Saiva saints and Siddhas. He sings : "My Lord, do I not belong to the illustrious line of your devotees who flourished in unintermittent succession like the plantains?"[5]

Ramalinga met with severe opposition from the orthodox Saivites of his time. He was branded a heretic and was called a pseudo-teacher of Saivism for his radical thinking and new teaching. He built a place of worship entirely different in structure from that of the Saiva temple and placed a light in the place of the idol. Some of his modern disciples contend that he broke away completely with Saivism. But this is not quite true. A careful examination of his teachings would reveal his faithfulness to the fundamental doctrine of Saivism. The bulk of his poems and lyrics is in praise of Lord Siva. While accepting the lofty ideals of Saivism, he ventured to show the 'more excellent way' along the lines of love and compassion. Thus he made the path of salvation accessible to the masses.

II

THE LIFE OF RAMALINGA SWAMY

The Announcement of His Birth

Ramalinga was born on the fifth of October 1823 at Marudhur, a place near Chidambaram. A Siva yogi is said to have predicted his birth to his mother saying, "You shall give birth to a son who will become great. He will do good to humanity by establishing *Sanmārga.*" His jātaka (horoscope) describes him as Ciranjīvi-one who will never die and will be hailed by the people of the world as Vaḷḷal or 'all-giver'. It is further stated in his jātaka that at the age of ten he would realize in himself the traits of a reformer through sakti, while at thirty he would attain freedom from the chain of birth, and become a Kaivalya at forty. At fifty he would obtain *Prāṇadēha* (imperishable body) of a Siddha.

Ramalinga states the purpose of his birth in one of his later verses : "It is to correct the people of the world whose heart is full of darkness and to gain for them admission into the *Sanmārga* sangam and thus make it possible for them the experience of heaven here and now that God has sent me in this *yuga,* charged with his divine grace". (5485)[1]

At the Temple

When Ramalinga was a baby he was taken by his parents to the temple at Chidambaram. It is said that the baby was fascinated by the vision of Nataraja and it burst into laughter. The

priest at once remarked to Ramalinga's father, "Your son has received the divine vision and grace; he is born for something great with the grace of God inherent in him".

A month after this incident Ramalinga's father died. The family moved to Ponneri, a place near Chennai. Sabapathy Pillai, the elder brother of Ramalinga, assumed the responsibilities for the family. He was a Tamil scholar and earned his livelihood by delivering lectures and discourses on the Puranas.

Too Great to be Taught

Ramalinga received his primary education from his brother. But he did not give proper attention to his studies. So Sabapathy sent him to his own teacher Kānchi Sabapathy Mudaliar. Ramalinga did not make any progress and neglected his studies. He spent much of his time at Kantakōṭṭam, a temple of Murukan͟.[2] Ramalinga's teacher overhead his songs and was struck with reverence and wonder at the profound knowledge and devotion of his student. He thought that he was too small to be his teacher and informed his brother that Ramalinga needed no longer to be his pupil.

Sabapathy, however, was annoyed at his brother's indifference to studies. He ordered his wife not to give Ramalinga food and clothing. Ramalinga's sister-in-law had motherly affection for him and so it was difficult for her to carry out the orders of her husband. She advised Ramalinga to enter the house by the back door and have his food when his brother was away. She also entreated Ramalinga with tears and kind words to take his studies seriously. Ramalinga was moved by her words and promised her that he would remain in the house and study the

lessons. He requested that a separate room be given to him where he could have his private prayers. His brother gave him a room upstairs.

Vision of Murukan̲ in the Upper Room

Ramalinga hung up a mirror on one of the walls of the room and decorated it with flowers. He lit an oil lamp before it. He also burnt incense and camphor in front of it. The spear-like image of the flame in the mirror enabled him to contemplate deeply on Murukan̲.[3] This kind of worship and meditation went on for several days. One day the divine form of Murukan̲ was visible to his eyes in the mirror. Ramalinga was only nine years old then. The incident had an abiding influence on Ramalinga. It led him to think of God as light and to introduce the mirror and lamp in the place of idols in the sanctuary he built later at Vaṭalūr.

Ramalinga tells in his writings that at this early age he was initiated into the learning of scriptures, literature and grammar without the intermediary of a human teacher. He sings to his Lord : "Thou hast given me understanding of Truth without the intermediary of a teacher in such measure that the learned ones come to me to learn of Thee." He also tells of an experience in which he was specially blessed by Murukan̲ who said in his ears a divine message and entered into him. This is said to have happened at the temple at Tiruvor̲r̲iyūr, a place near Chennai. He often tells in his verses that *Ñān̲acampantar*, one among the Samaya Acaryas of Saivism, who lived twelve centures before him, was in fact his guru. Ramalinga further believed that *Ñān̲acampantar* was the incarnation of Murukan̲ himself.

Young Ramalinga Delivers a Discourse

Ramalinga at this early stage is said to have delivered an excellent discourse on a passage in *Periayapurāṇam*.[4] He was sent in the place of his brother who had fallen ill. The passage that was to be expounded was the life history of Campantar, the spiritual guru of Ramalinga. Ramalinga started the discourse and continued until midnight, explaining only two lines in the first stanza. There was great astonishment on the part of the audience and Ramalinga was requested to continue the discourse on Ñāṉacampantar in the following weeks. This event stands as an important one in the life Ramalinga as it brought him out of the seclusion of his room into the wider world.

Sabapaty gradually understood that his brother was indeed a seer. His attitude to him changed to one of adoration.

"Here Goes the Man!"

During this time Ramalinga used to make his daily visits to the temple at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr. His biographers have recorded several mystical incidents connected with his visits to the temple. One incident is to this effect : There was a sanyāsi lying on the verandah of a house in the Main Car Street leading to the temple. He would abuse all those who passed by, using words like donkey, bull etc. No one dared to go near him and stop him from this. When he saw Ramalinga passing, he exclaimed, "Here goes the man" Ramalinga went near him and whispered something in his ears. The sanyāsi left the place for good.

Early Writings

Ramalinga wrote a number of lyrics and poems during this period. One of his best compositions, *Iṅkitamālai* was written at this time. It was written in the form of a dialogue between a husband and his wife, who are none other than God and the individual soul. Ramalinga attempted prose writing also during this early period of his life. He produced a book on justice. It was based on the story of the ancient Tamil king Manu Nīti Cōḻaṉ. The book was commended by several Tamil scholars of the day. By this time Ramalinga had gathered round him a small circle of friends and disciples, which included his former teacher Kānchi Sabapathy Mudaliyar.

Desire for Ascetic Life

Ramalinga's brother wanted him to get married. He was persuaded to accept the proposal. It is recorded that he spent the first night of his wedded life in reading *Tiruvācakam* with his wife. He never tried the life of a married man. He desired the life of an ascetic from his young age and led a life of simplicity and humility. In one of his poems he says that he would hold his hands folded while walking and cover his body with two pieces of white cloth. He feared to sit on a high pedestal and cross his legs in a majestic manner. He was afraid to sing aloud and would not sleep on a soft bed. He had no desire for money and as a sign of his disdain for wealth would often throw coins in ponds and tanks. (3454; 3461) In this he resembled Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Ramalinga did not like living in Madras. He hated city life. He liked spending his time in meditation in rural and forest areas.

Finally he decided to leave Madras and make a pilgrimage to some of the sacred places in Tamil Nadu. Some friends of his accompanied him. The pilgrimage was undertaken by foot. He visited Kānjipuram, Chidambaram, Sīrkāḻi and several other places. Accepting the invitation of a friend he came to Karunkuḻi, a village near Chidambaram.

Nine Years at Karunkuḻi

Ramalinga came to Karunkuḻi in 1858. He was thirty-five then. He stayed there for nine years. During this period he wrote a number of lyrics and poems. He preached his disciples and to people who lived in Karunkuḻi and the nearby villages. The theme of his preaching was love and compassion towards all beings. He made his message simple so that the illiterate people could follow it without any difficulty. He appealed to the people who came to him to give up meat-eating. He also pointed out the importance of devotion to God for attaining grace. Learned men and orthodox Saivites would often came to him to hold debates and ask questions, some to learn and others to criticise. Ramalinga used to answer their questions patiently and argue with them in such a manner as to give a clear exposition of their teachings. He is said to have performed several miracles during the years he spent at Karunkuḻi. Once he cured a man afflicted with a chronic eye disease, and the man recovered his lost eyesight.

By this time many became the disciples of Ramalinga. Ramalinga looked different from the traditional Saivite ascetics. He did not wear saffron coloured clothes. He wore a white robe. He was short and thin and had a sorrowful look in his eyes. His biographers say that he had attained the imperishable *svarṇa deha*

or golden body of Siddha by then. Photographers could not take his picture although they attempted to do so on eight occasions.

Founding of the Sangam

Convinced that a society should be set up for spreading his message of compassion to all living beings *(Jīvakāruṇyam)* and the principles of his True Path (*Sa<u>n</u>mārga*), he established in 1865 the *Samarasa Suddha Sa<u>n</u>mārga Sangam.* Membership was open to all who had compassion towards living beings and who vowed to abstain from killing and flesh-eating. No restrictions were imposed on the basis of caste, creed, religion or nationality. Provision was made for flesh eaters to be 'outer members' till they gave it up. Ramalinga wrote in a pamphlet that the president of the *Sangam* was the Lord himself and all those who have *aruḷ* or compassion were its members.

The main objectives of the *Sangam* as pointed out in the writings of Ramalinga are as follows:

1. Teaching and practice of *Jīvakāruṇyam.*
2. Abolishing meat-eating, temple sacrifices and superstitious beliefs.
3. Casting away *jāti* and *var<u>n</u>a* (caste) differences and bringing about unity among people of all creeds by making them realize the oneness of all souls in love. (*Ā<u>n</u>manēya Orumaippāṭu*].
4. Inculcation of the glorious life without death.

Ministry at Vaṭalūr

In 1866 Ramalinga made Pārvatipuram, a nearby village, his centre of activities. It came to be known as Vaṭalūr . The first thing that Ramalinga did when he moved to this place was the

building of a charity home. He built it up with the help of his wealthy friends and named it *Sattiya Dharmasālai*. It was his strong conviction that physical poverty should be removed before making any attempt to feed people with spiritual food.

On inaugurating the *Dharmasālai*, Ramalinga read out to the people his treatise on *Jīvakāruṇyam*. It explains the main features of the concept in logical sequence. The *Dharmasālai* is still functioning at Vaṭalūr.

Ramalinga started a training centre for the *Saṉmārga sēvaks*. It was named Samarasa *Vēda Pādasālai*. Similarly, a school for children was run on the campus of the *Dharmasālai*. It is interesting to note that Ramalinga made arrangements for instruction to be given to children in Tamil, Sanskrit and English.

Songs of Divine Grace

In the following year a collection of his poems which forms the first part of his *Tiruvaruṭpā* (Songs of divine grace) was published by some of his disciples on behalf of the *sangam*. Ramalinga never wanted the concluding part of his work to be published. He believed that the truths mentioned in it were specially meant for the inner circle of his disciples.

Ramalinga's poems and lyrics are written in chaste Tamil and they reveal his mystical as well as his revolutionary thinking. *Tiruvaruṭpā* contains about 7,000 poems. The book is divided into six parts. It includes the poems he wrote for the inner circle. A few selected poems are given below in English translation.[5]

God Caught in Love

My Lord ! you are very great like a mountain, but you come within the handgrip called Love. You are a great king who enters into the small hut called devotion. You are the (priceless) treasure that is caught in the net called Love... You are very great and unfathomable like an ocean, but you abide in the small pot called Love... You are the effulgent lustre that abides even in a small atom. You are the Almighty Siva who is the very incarnation of Love. (3269)

A Miserable Offender I Am

All your devotees sing you praise in sweet music ; they worship at your feet ; they look continuously at the indescribable beauty of your form, feast their eyes, exult in the immeasurable joy at heart, pour forth torrents of tears from their eyes and dance in that ecstasy. They reflect incessantly on your grace and cry, 'My father', but I, a sinner, am much vexed by my fraudulent mind ; alas! What am I to do with it?[6]

(601)

Take Me to your Bosom

If a father takes to task his mischievous son, the boy's mother will come to his rescue; if on the other hand, the mother punishes him for his faults, the father will console the boy. But I have, for my father and mother, none but you, my lord!...... I am completely exhausted ; it is enough, please stop punishing me any further ; but embrace me with all your grace[7].

A Petition to the Lord

...Please grant me the acquaintance of the good that concentrate all their thoughts on your lotus-like feet with unparalleled devotion; give me the power to shun the association of those whose thoughts and words differ; make me extol your glory and refrain from saying falsehood ; direct me to tread the righteous path ; save me from being grappled by the devil of religious fanaticism ; help me to forget completely the desire for women ; and never to forget thee ; shower on me the pure knowledge and the wealth of your grace so as to enable me to live a full and eternal life free from disease[8].

Life and Service for your Glory

O, my father, this is my appeal. Please hear and grant it to me. I must love all living beings and serve them. I must traverse the length and breadth of the entire world and proclaim your glory and grace. I must wield the sceptre of your gracious light so that the true path of *Sanmārgam, which* occupies an ineffably supreme position, may flourish elsewhere. You must also forgive me, if I commit any mistake, unaware, in my enthusiasm ; and grant me that state of inseparable union with you, my Lord[9].

Reverence for Life

...Whenever I saw crops withering for want of rain, my heart did wither too. When I happened to see poor people exhausted and worn out due to starvation for days together, even after begging at every door with their hunger never satisfied, my heart throbbed obsessed by grief. When I came across people suffering for a long time from incurable and chronic diseases, I

was agonised. When I met people spotlessly honourable but totally depressed on account of poverty, I also got depressed[10].

The Wisdom of Deathlessness

The four vedas, the *Agamas* and all the *sāstras* do not become our own wisdom, but remain only outside ourselves as our wisdom for the market. By experiencing the Absolute, the Lord Beyond, I have come to learn the wisdom of deathlessness[11].

Return to the Lord

In castes, in philosophical dogmas, in the ceremonials of sectarian practices, in the noisy debates on *Sastras,* in the wars of *Gotras*-

Pinning your faith in these differences, distinctions and quarrels from time immemorial, you men and women of the world are restless and tossed about hither and thither...

The Lord...is now coming to open and in the broad day light of our experience will play his unique game of glory and grace.

It is therefore time for you to turn this way. And I do call you all, men and women of the world, in the name of our Lord and Master, to your in effable destiny of perfection[12].

Satya Jnāna Sabai

Ramalinga had been making plans for the building of a place of worship. He drew up the plan for its construction with his own hand and gave it to his disciples and asked them to erect the structure. The building was completed in 1871 and was open for worship. Ramalinga named it *Satya Jnāna Sabai* (Hall of True Wisdom). It was designed in the shape of a full-blown lotus flower

representing the human body, the temple of God. A mirror and an oil lamp were installed in the sanctuary. Seven curtains were put in front of the glass. They represented the seven *saktis,* the veils of illusion. Every year on Taippūsam[1] the curtains were to be removed one by one so as to have a clear vision of the lamp in the glass, shining in splendour. The implication is that *Suddha Sivam* or *Para Sivam* could be seen only after passing beyond these *saktis* of illusion. The *Jōti Darisanam* continues till today. On Taippūsam day thousands of people crowd at Vaṭalūr.

Opposition from the Orthodox Saivites

Ramalinga's fame spread all over Tamil Nadu and people flocked to Vaṭalūr from far and near. Orthodox Saivites were watching the activities of Ramalinga and the *Sangam* with suspicion and hatred. The publication of Ramalinga's work under the title *Tiruvaruṭpā* aroused their fury. The title, they contended, was applicable only to their twelve canonical devotional books *(Tirumuṟai).* They branded Ramalinga a heretic and blasphemer. Their hatred grew all the more when they found the lyrics and poems of Ramalinga being sung in homes, schools and temples, sometimes replacing the singing of *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam.* They began to abuse Ramalinga openly and told the people that he can by no means be regarded as a Samaya Ācārya and given equal status with the authors of the canonical books. Further, they found fault with Ramalinga's title *Vaḷḷalār.*Although Ramalinga did not apply the title to himself, he was criticised as one who considered himself equal to God by allowing such a title to be applied to himself. Another serious charge brought against Ramalinga was that he built the Satya Jnāna Sabai as a rival to the Sabai at Chidambaram.

The opposition came chiefly from the great madatipatis (Heads of madams or monasteries) of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Tiruvāduthurai and Dharmapuram.

Ārumuga Nāvalar, a great Tamil scholar and staunch Saivite of Jaffna, was in Tamil Nadu at that time and he was instigated by the heads of the madams to fight against Ramalinga. He started abusing Ramlinga in public meetings, and he wrote booklets criticising him. He ridiculed Ramalinga's work *Aruṭpā* (verses of grace) as *Maruṭpā* (verses of fear). He also filed a suit against Ramalinga and dragged him to the court. Ramalinga defended himself and won the case.

However, the debate over his person and work continued for over two years. During this period a number of pamphlets were written and published by his enemies condemning Ramalinga and his writings. Some of them were answered by his disciples.

Ramalinga was deeply wounded in heart. He felt sorry for having engaged himself in this controversy. In a verse written at that time, he invites his adversaries in touching words to forget all hatred and join him :

> O ye men of controversy, please listen to me. Do not waste your time. Learn to admire and praise the dance of the Lord in the sabai of grace. He will not reject you for your evil words. Instead, he will receive you. These are not words of deception. I tell these for your own good since I consider you as my kith and kin.[14]
>
> (5454)

Mistaken for a Miracle-maker

Ramalinga was disappointed when people misunderstood and misinterpreted his abilities in performing miracles as a Siddhu. People began to crowd around him in large numbers with the only intention of witnessing the miracles. Many wanted to get benefited by those miracles. They began even to bring the dead to Vaṭalūr. Some of the evil disciples of Ramalinga started collecting money from the people promising cures and blessings without the knowledge of their master.

A Danish missionary, C. Ochs, who visited the area in 1871 writes in a letter published in the 'Danish Missions Blad' *(Danish Missionary Journal,* 1872,p. 52) as follows :

> At Vaṭalūr a swindler is going around these days. He pretends to be able to raise the dead. The missionary at Paṇṇuruṭṭi told me that in these days this man shall perform the trick which he has promised for a long time. People are coming from far-off places to see him. He is in a hurry to perform this miracle. Recently his booty was stolen by thieves. Now he wants to make the lost money by deceiving people... In Paṇṇuruṭṭi, a man who was dying is reported to have ordered his wife not to cremate his body but instead to send a sum of money to the miracle-maker so that he would raise him to life when he had died.[15]

Ramalinga does speak in his poems about the dead being raised and prays God to grant him the gift of restoring life to the dead. One verse runs like this :

> O gracious light that showed the ability to make all the dead

rise with joy, grant me, I pray, that virtue which would empower me to raise the dead at my wish and bidding.
(4082)

Elsewhere he says that he prayed for a never-decaying body, destructible neither by the five elements nor by the Lord of Death, and says that he was granted the boon. (5460) But he never attempted to raise the dead. He only preached that by following *Suddha Saṉmārga* and *Jīvakāruṇyam* the imperishable body of a Siddha could be obtained.

The gross misunderstanding on the part of the people made him write a public appeal in 1873, requesting them not to be deceived by the rumour that a miracle was to take place at Vaṭalūr on 20-9-1873. In the concluding lines of the appeal we have these words:

"We are not sure whether a miracle is going to take place or not ; nor can we be sure of its happening now or at some other time in the future. So be on your guard and do not be deceived".

The Closing of the Sabai

Ramalinga was further disappointed when he found his followers slipping away from the ideals of *Suddha Saṉmārga*. He noticed a growing tendency among them to regard him as a demi god. Ramalinga strongly rebuked them for this. In a verse addressed to the members of the Sangam he says :

Please listen to me, ye men of *Saṉmārga Sangam*. I speak, prostrating myself at your feet. *Only consider me as one among*

you. Worship only the God Almighty. Do not speak in the fashion of people who profess false religions and spoil your wisdom. (5452)

The indisciplined life of his followers and the disappointing behaviour of people in general to his teachings were most painful to him. In 1873 he ordered the Jnāna Sabai building to be locked up and he kept the keys with himself. He is reported to have said the following words to those who were around him at that time:

> You are not worthy to be members of the *Sangam*. The real members of the *Sangam* are living far away in the north. You do not follow the principles of my teachings. It appears that you are determined not to be convinced by me. Before long some people from Russia and America and other foreign countries will come to this land and preach to you the same doctrine of universal love and brotherhood that I have all along preached to you. Then you will know and appreciate the great truths which I have been vainly trying to put before you. You will also find the brothers from the north doing many wonders in India.

Final Discourse and Samādhi

After closing the Sabai, Ramalinga made his abode in a nearby village called Mēṭṭukkuppam. He stayed there in a small hut which he named *Siddhi Viḷāgam* (Abode of Siddhi). Soon he decided to get absorbed in *yōga nittirai or samādhi.* On 30th January 1873 Ramalinga delivered his final discourse to his disciples. He said :

> Friends, I opened a shop but there was none to purchase ; so I have closed it. I will not be visible to your eyes for a certain period, although I will be universally present in the world. My

imperishable body will enter into the bodies of all living beings. I will reappear again at the proper time after having preached my message in other countries. Till then take to the path of *Jīvakāruṇyam*. Worship God in the form of light and attain salvation.

Ramalinga went into his room and stretched himself on a carpet. He gave orders that the room be locked from outside. He had already told his disciples not to open the room and not to be disappointed as he would not be visible to their eyes. He also told them that if the government officers ordered the door to be opened, there was no need to fear, for by the grace of God nothing would be found in the room.

The news of the miraculous disappearance of Ramalinga spread everywhere. The local police reported the matter to higher authorities suspecting foul play. J.H. Garstin, I.C.S., the then Collector of South Arcot District came to the spot and made an enquiry. He did not order the room to be opened. Instead he contributed twenty rupees for a feast to the poor arranged in memory of Ramalinga. He also wrote a few lines about Ramalinga in the *South Arcot District Manual* published in 1878 and it was later reprinted in the *South Arcot District Gazetteer* in 1906. The following is an extract from the collector's report :

...In 1874, he locked himself in a room (still in existence in Mēṭṭukkuppam, hamlet of Karunkuḻi) which he used for samādhi or mystic meditation, and instructed his disciples not to open it for some time. He has never been seen since and the room is still locked. It is held by those who still believe in him that he was miraculously made one with his God and that in the fullness of time he will reappear to the faithful.

The report concludes with these words :

> Whatever may be thought of this claims to be a religious leader, it is generally admitted, by those who are judges of *such matters, that his poems, many of which have been* published, stand on a high plane, and his story is worth nothing as an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take.

Ramalinga is said to have granted visions to several of his disciples during the period that immediately followed his miraculous disappearance.

Forerunner of the Theosophical Society

Tholuvūr Vēlāyutha Mudaliar was one among the leading disciples of Ramalinga. He was serving in the Tamil department of the Presidency College, Madras. He gave a statement to the Theosophical Society regarding the life and work of Ramalinga. He quoted *Ramalinga's prophecy concerning the coming of persons* from Russia and America after him to preach the same gospel he preached. He concludes his statement in the following words :

> *This prophecy has, in my opinion, just been literally fulfilled.* The fact that the Mahatmas in the North exist, is no new idea to us as Hindus ; and the strange fact that the advent of Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott from Russia and America was foretold several years before they came to India, is an incontrovertible proof that my Guru was in communication with those Mahatmas under whose direction the Theosophical Society was subsequently founded.[16]

This statement was published in the journal *The Theosophist* (July, 1882) with an editorial comment by H.P. Blavatsky :

> This is one of those cases of previous foretelling of a coming event which is least of all open to suspicion of bad faith. The honourable character of the witness, the wide publicity of his Guru's monuments, and the impossibility that he could have got from public rumour, or the journals of the day, any intimation that the Theosophical Society would be formed and would operate in India-all these conspire to support the inference that Ramalingam Yōgi was verily in the counsels of those who ordered us to found the society. In March 1873, we were directed to proceed from Russia to Paris. In June we were told to proceed to the United States where we arrived on July 6th... This was the very time when Ramalinga was forcibly prefiguring the events which should happen...

The Second Coming of Ramalinga

Since Ramalinga had stated in his final discourse that he would reappear again at the proper time, after having preached his message in other countries, several of his followers sincerely believe that his second coming will take place in history. M.P. Sivagnanam, in his biography of Ramalinga, sees this second coming in the advent of Mahatma Gandhi who also came from the North and who was born in the month of October as was Ramalinga. Further, Gandhi died on January 30, 1948 the same date on which Swamy Ramalinga attained Samādhi seventy-four years ago.[17]

However, most of the modern disciples and biographers of Ramalinga do not give any importance to his second coming. Ūraṉaṭikaḷ who has written the most recent biography of Ramalinga, in his monumental work says the following words regarding his second coming : "My answer to the question Will *Vaḷḷalār* (Ramalinga) come again? is this. No one talks about saints like Ñāṉacampantar coming again. So also there is no need for talk about the Swamy's second coming".[18]

But Ūraṉaṭikaḷ firmly believes that Ramalinga was born in previous birth as *Tāyumāṉavar,* who was a great Saiva saint of Tamil Nadu.[19] He was a philosophical poet and he had discoursed at length on the equality of all religions. He lived about two hundred and fifty years before Ramalinga.

III

THE MISSION AND MESSAGE OF RAMALINGA SWAMY

The Teachings of the Tamil Siddhas

As observed earlier, Ramalinga Swamy has acknowledged his indebtedness to the Tamil Siddhas by identifying himself as one coming in the unintermittent succession of the Siddhas. The teachings of the Siddhas provide proper perspective for understanding the inner experience as well as the socio-religious spirituality commended by Ramalinga Swamy in his writings. The message of the Tamil Siddhas is based on the direct experience of God over against the cultic beliefs and practices of their times. Most of them lived during the 10th and 15th century A.D. *Tirumūlar*, the author of Tirumantiram, probably lived during the 6th and 7th century A.D. He is supposed to be the oldest of all the Siddhas and his poems surpass the writings of other siddhas both in number and quality.

The Tamil Siddhas are said to be 18 in number, but many others are also considered to be Siddhas. Several of them belong to a later age. Their poetical works, in most cases, belong to medicine, alchemy, astrology and yoga. Kailasapathy thinks that the number 18 itself had some mystical significance. Gorakhanath, one of the chief Nath Yogis, appears in the list. The 18 Siddhas are : *Sivavākkiyar, Paṭṭiṉattār,* P*attirakiriyār, Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar, Iṭaikkāṭṭu Cittar, Akappēyār* and *Kutampaiyār, Kaṭuveḷiyār, Aḻuguniyār, Koṅkaṇar, Caṭṭai Muṉi, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, Akattiyar, Tirumūlar, Subramaṇiyar, Vālmīkar, Rāmadēvar, and Karuvūrār.* Among these, the first 8 are the popular ones while *Tirumūlar* is

held in high esteem as literary and religious genius. The name *Karuvūrār* is very similar to *Karuvūrtēvar*, author of one of the 12 Saivite *Tirumuṟais*.[1]

The Tamil Siddhas have their counterparts in the Vacanakārās of Vīrasaivism. The poems of the Bauls of Bengal, Kabir and his followers are very similar to the message of the Tamil Siddhas. The Siddhas were revolutionaries in that they challenged the authority of the scriptures and condemned ritualistic ceremonies and the caste system in particular. Several of them hailed from low castes and they were well accepted by the people. Although the origin and substance of their teachings are often considered to be Tantric, many of them have deviated from the basic tantric principles of sexuality and have adopted the language of the *bhakti* cult to a considerable extent. Several of them preferred to use simple language and so invented and introduced popular literary style. Kailasapathy observes : "In terms of literary crafts and conventions, the Siddhas revolutionised Tamil poetry especially religio-philosophic poetry by bringing into the world the language of folklore. This bold device became irrevocable."[2] Kamil Zvelebil rightly points out that their language "is more often than not almost vulgar ; at any rate it is a simple, colloquial idiom, close to the speech of the masses."[3]

The Cittars and Religious Awareness

The *Cittars* speak of their religious experience chiefly from the yogic point of view. Excepting *Akappēyar* and *Kaṭuveḷiyār* all others speak of yōga or Siva-yōga. They are never tired of repeating the methods prescribed for raising the *kuṇṭaliṉi* from *mūlādhāram* through the six circles. But their writings are not completely free from presenting the inner experience with *bhakti*

overtones. Some of the prominent *cittars* like *Tirumūlar, Tāyumāṉavar* and *Paṭṭiṉattār* were well versed in *bhakti* terminology. Their poems abound in *bhakti* ideas. Some of their verses stand on equal par with those of the great Saivite poets of Tamil Nadu. While speaking about their religious awareness the cittars chiefly emphasize the immanence of God in man, the mystical union with God and the charismatic gifts obtained by them by following the mystical yogic path.

(a) The Indwelling of God

Primary importance is given to the knowledge of the indwelling God. The divine indwelling is often stated by them as the 'inner light'. In a sense the *cittars* are the Quakers of Tamil Nadu. The chief exponent of the 'inner light' in simple verse form is *Sivavākkiyar*. His verses are powerful and persuasive. While speaking about the vain search made by people for attaining the divine light he sings :

Millions and millions of people
have run all along
seeking, searching and looking for
the light that is within !
Getting completely exhausted
they die at last. [4]

The light is not in heaven ;
it is in our own selves. (497)

He describes the inner light as 'the light that raises from the basic vein' (18). In another verse he refers to it as 'the light of knowledge'. "This light", he says, "if meditated upon for four *nāḻikai* (four minutes) by a yogi will enable him to renew his youth

and supreme Brahmanhood" (68). According to him a true yogi is 'one who blows fire' in the yogic fashion (175, 185). He proclaims that once the compartment of fire in man *(neruppaṟai)* is opened, he attains divinity. (122)

I was in such a state
that I did not know
the One in me !
Now that I have known
the same, the indwelling One,
who can see the One in me?
I have known him
deep, deep in my heart. (6)

I do not have anybody in my heart
excepting God and myself. (90)

He is hiding himself in me (293)

See, he is in you as your watchman. (126)

Iṭaikkāṭar speaks of this light as 'the true lamp within' when he sings :

Why do you stumble
You fool,
When you have the true lamp
Within your own self?
Your state is skin
to those who would get drowned
in the sea
despite their holding
a lamp in hand (74)

Similarly, some other *cittars* qualify the light within variously in their poems. *Tirumūlar* calls it 'the light as the base' *(mūlātārajōti)*. *Tāyumāṉavar* speaks of the yogic fire as 'the flame at the base' (mūlakkaṉal).

The inner light is also referred to in terms which have no particular association with the symbol of light. *Paṭṭiṉattār* calls it 'the basic seed *(mūlavittu)* while *Pāmpāṭṭiyār* uses the expression ' basic root' *(mūlavēr)*.

Tirumūlar views the divine light both in its transcendental and immanent aspects. He calls the former 'the natural divine light' *(Ñāṉaviḷakkoḷi)*. The latter is said to be seen in three stages while practising yōga. The first stage represents the light seen as the basic light in the base of the body *(mūlātāram)* when the yogi sits in the yogic posture. It is called *mūlaviḷakkoḷi*. It should be noted that the yogic processes *Tirumūlar* speaks of are related to Sivayōga. He equates the inner light in all the three stages with Sivam. The Siva-yōgis reach the splendid inner light and thus obtain *mukti*. *Tirumūlar* says :

> They (Siva-yōgis use the thirty-six *tattvas* as
> ladder steps for *mukti* state and do reach the
> splendid inner light. They see for themselves
> the indescribable Sivam and with clear
> knowledge they meditate being seated firmly as
> Sivam itself. (170)

Sivavākkiyar in his exposition of Siva-yōga equates the inner yogic light with the five letters of *Sivāyanama*. The five letters rise from the base circle *(mūlavaṭṭam)*.

The fire comes out
rising from the five letters
that have emerged from
the basic circle. (469)

Similarly the sacred dance of Siva is related to the inner light that is raised up within the body through the middle nerve *(naṭunāṭi)* or *suṣupti*. *Tirumūlar* states this experience as follows

Going through the middle nerve
to the top of the head
from where
the ambrosia of moon
flows unceasingly,
I saw him who is
the blissful light eternal.
He performs his sacred dance
in the blissful hall divine. (569)

Pāmpāṭṭiyār declares that he has reached the highest stage of obtaining the feet of Siva through the knowing and raising of the inner light :

Raise slowly the heat and
direct it in the stream
that runs through the street.
Then,
dance my dear snake !
Since we have reached his feet
having sought the divine light
between the eyebrows
above the nose. (115)

(a) Naṭunāṭi or Suṣupti

Experiencing the inner light to the full includes drinking of ambrosia which is called the nectar of moon. The *cittars* refer to it as *madiyamutam* and *Semmatippāl*. It is said to be oozing between the Siva-yōgi's eyebrows.

(b) Mystical Union

The *cittars* speak of the mystical union with God in Advaitic as well as Saivite terminology. *Paṭṭiṉattār* describes his mystical union with God thus :

I am you and
you are me indeed
when we two become one !
O Lord of perfection
You are ever sweet
like the taste of honey. *(Pūraṇamālai 100)*

Addressing his own heart he sings :

My heart, you are merged now
with that which has
no name and address
light and space
and qualities of any kind. *(Neñjoṭu Makiḻtal, 9)*

You are merged with that, my heart,
which fills every place by its very self
as feeling and intellect. (2)

You have reached the place
that cannot be described. (26)

The *vāsana, yōga* and
the sphere of utter speechlessness
have gone.
Now my heart,
You have reached that state
which has no differentiation
whatsoever. (30)

P*attirakiriyār* longs for this state in his long poem of lamentation :

When shall I know
the truth of *mukti* state
from within my soul
that is said to be *advaita* like? (202)

When shall I know in my heart
that you are yourself
and I am myself and thus
we are two while you are
the One as well? (192)

When shall I be One with you
and remain in the same state
having you abide in me? (160)

When shall I surrender myself to him
knowing through the eye of knowledge
that the present differentiation of 'I' and 'He'
and realize myself becoming one with himself. (720)

The verses quoted above from *Paṭṭiṉattār* and *Pattirakiriyār* lend themselves for both non-dualistic and theistic interpretations. Several verses like the one given below bring out the theistic nature of the union typically expounded in Saiva Siddhanta :

When shall I stand absorbed
under your gracious feet
leaving and forgetting the body
the store house of filth and worms? (40)

The mystical union is said to be the state that transcends the knowledge gained by *Vedas* and *Saṣtras*:

Pattirakiriyār puts it thus :

When shall I see for myself
the great mystery
which is not found by the four Vedas
although they searched for the same. (48)

Kudampaiyār puts the same idea in a verse when he sings :

Will any written bond
be of any use
to those who rely on
the open space for truth? (8)

Kudampaiyār subordinates everything else to the highest of union with God. In the following verses, however, some *cittars* like *Iṭaikkāṭar* and *Akappēyār* make clear reference to the Advaitic union or *nirvikalpa samādhi* in their writings :

When one reaches Brahman
which is praised as the highest
Often by Vedas and Agamas,
sensual experiences, food, evil,
passion, anger, cheat and threat
will completely vanish. (*Iṭaikkāṭar*, 24)

No more do I exist
nor does the Lord !
There is no 'I' anymore
So also there is no Satguru
anymore ! (*Akappēyā*r, 70)

It may be noted that in general the *cittars* adopt theistic terms to express the nature of their union with God. Saivite terms abound in their writings.

In the following verses *Kudampai Cittar* brings out clearly the supremacy of the mystical union over knowledge, privacy, formalities, yoga, *bhakti* and worship :

Is knowledge of any use
to those whose hearts bubble with joy
while they remain
in the conscious state of bliss? (15)

Is privacy necessary
for those who cross over death
and tread on the path
that is unique? (13)

what's the necessity for a veil
for those who roam about

in the light in the city? (29)

For those who are in the company
of their husband - Lord
where is the need for formalities? (32)

Will the six circles be of any use
for the wise who have risen up
from the basic triangle? (17)

Would the liberated one
need any singing? (20)

For the wise who wander about
like a dead corpse-
where's the need for cymbals? (24)

Akappēyār declares that those who have known their real selves will not attach themselves with anything whatsoever.

(24, 78)

The *Cittars* speak the language of the *bhaktas* when they attempt to describe the mystical nature of their union with the Lord. A typical example is a lyric written by *Tāyumāṉavar* in bridal terms. He conveys his experience in the words of a girl who narrates her intimate union with her lover to a friend of hers :

The beginning less One,
Yet who is the beginning of all,
Who is light divine
appeared to me as speechless one
and spoke to me, my sister,
with words unspoken !

He is Sankara, the self-existing One!

How shall I narrate the words he spoke !
Cunningly he made me sit alone
and with no aid
he made me enjoy the state of bliss!
My sister, he did embrace me !
He is Sankara, the self-existing One!

He asked me to give up all attachments
and cling to him alone !
How shall I narrate to you, my sister
the joy, I obtained in his embrace?
He is Sankara, the self-existing One !

I was educated, my sister !
If I say this in open, I will spoil my career !
But, you see, he is not my illegal lover !
He is my Lord who keeps me
Under his own care.
He is Sankara, the self-existing One !

54-Ānanda Kaḷippu

The *cittars* often refer to their mystical experience in terms of *transcendental space.*

Pattirakiriyār speaks of the state as the 'one great open space' (ēka veḷi, 96). He also refers to it as 'the great space beyond the six *ādārams* and supreme space' (*para veḷi,* 110). *Sivavākkiyar* also calls it 'the space of broad day light' *(veṭṭa veḷi), Iṭaikkāṭar* uses the expression *veṭṭaveḷinaṭu* (the country of broad day light, 88). *Pāmpāṭṭiyar* combines Vēdānta with the transcendental space, *(vēdāntaveḷi).* The *cittars* connect Brahman

or Para Sivam or Sada-Sivam with the transcendental space. This terminology has yogic affiliations also. It is particularly connected with the yogic concept of transcending the top of the head through the thousand petalled circle *(Sahasrāram)*. *Tirumūlar* speaks of this as 'the upper opening' (602) and equates it with 'the supreme space' (*para veḷi,* 591). The yōgi who has raised his *kuṇṭaliṉi* fire from *mūlātāram* through the central *nadi* with controlling of breath and sends it out through the opening on top of his head is called the yōgi who has attained the first rank- *(Talaippu eidiya yōgi)* (*Tirumūlar,* 732).

The transcendental space is also called pāl (vacuuity) by some *cittars*. *Tirumūlar* refers to it as the vacuuity to be found in the transcendental space of grace *(aruḷveḷippāl)*. It is to be recognized over against vacuuity of *māya (māyappāl)* and vacuuity of *jīva. (jīvappāl),* (*Tirumūlar* 2457). The three vacuuities are often referred to together as 'the three vacuuities' *(muppāl) Paṭṭiṉattār, Iṭaikkāṭar* and *Akappēyār* make reference to pāl in their writings.

The transcendental space is also spoken of in terms of light. *Tirumūlar* calls it *Cōtiveḷi* (the space of light) (2766). It is the space of Siva (2761). This resplendent divine light *(akanda veḷi)* is presented as the most brilliant over against the cosmic light or the light of Sun *(andaoḷi)* and the light of *jīva (pindaoḷi)*. Although *jīvas* have the divine light within themselves they are marred by the light of the Sun (*Tirumūlar,* 2761).

The *cittars* describe the indescribable nature of this state where God is seen as open space, vaccuity or light resplendent. The supreme experience of God, according to them, is beyond description. It transcends all human acknowledge. The only

means available to express it is silence. The only possible state discovered to retain the experience is the state of conscious sleep or the state akin to the condition of the dead body.

Tirumūlar considers this state of speechlessness as the supreme state which transcends the six ends *(ṣaṭāntam)* of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. They are *nādāntam, pōdāntam, yōgāntam, vēdāntam, kālāntam* and *cittāntam.*

Pāmpāṭṭiyār proclaims :

Do not utter words
my dear snake !
Be quiet and dance
so that,
Our reaching of the supreme state
may be made known. (122)

Those who have seen the truth
Will not describe it.
Those who give descriptions of it
will never experience it ! (105)

Pattirakiriyār sings extensively about this state and expresses his longing for attaining the same :

When shall I reach the state
of perfect speechlessness
forgetting rituals and ceremonies
performed in love? (152)

He compares the state to the speechlessness of a dumb person who had a dream but could not narrate the experience in words. He longs to attain that stage:

When shall I know the state of bliss
which is indescribable
as the dream of a dumb person? (182)

He equates the state with a kind of conscious sleep. His long poem of lamentation opens with the following verse :

When shall I attain bliss
with the state of conscious sleep
with my ego suppressed
and my senses destroyed? (1)

His further description of the state includes equating the same with the state of a child, wandering ghost and corpse :

Oh for the day I become child-like,
wander about as deaf and dumb,
and live like a departed spirit
with great love for you ! (my Lord). (17)

Oh for the day I attain the state
in which I'll be free
from birth and death
and become speechless and breathless
with no thought and forgetfuless
and be just dead. (124)

Paṭṭiṉattār also speaks about the ghost like wandering of the liberated persons :

Wandering like departed spirits,
the men of true wisdom
lay themselves down like corpses.
Like stray dogs they eat
what is given as alms.
Their movements are like
those of foxes.
They treat all women
as their own mother
and teach simplicity to all.
Like little children indeed
they live their lives. (122)

The Pāsupatās, a group of sectarian Saivites practised this kind of wandering and conscious sleep. According to *Pāsupata Sūtra,* "the adept in this stage should wander like a *prēta* (ghost) ; should smear his body with ashes and dust like a poor man or a lunatic; should not cut his hair, beard or nails; should pretend to sleep while awake ; should tremble as if sick; should limp ; should make amorous gestures at women and should speak non-sense".[5]

It appears that some *cittars,* like *Paṭṭiṉattār* were influenced by the teachings of the Pāsupata School.

Tirumūlar states that in the states of conscious or mystical sleep the Siva-yogis see within themselves *Sivalōka, Sivayōga* and *Sivabhōga.*

By the yogic conscious sleep
they have seen within themselves
Sivalōkam, Sivayōgam and *Sivabhōgam.*

How shall I explain the bliss of those
who have seen all these three
in the state of conscious sleep? (173)

Some *cittars* describe the mystical state as *Camaracam (Samarasa)*. The meaning of the phrase is variously stated as 'equality' 'harmony', 'identity' and impartiality' (colloquial).[6] *Maraimalai Atikal* has emphasised the harmonizing element in *Samarasam*. According to him it functions towards "a harmonizing of all men by pointing to a common truth to which all could subscribe".[7] Issac Thambiah has pointed out that *Samarasam* should not be mistaken for "a colourless eclectism, an anaemic acquiscence in the pacific thought that all religions are the same".[8] This phrase has been used by cittars like *Tāyumāṉavar* with specific reference to the harmony between Vedanta and Siddhanta. As Thambiah observes this harmony is spoken particularly in the matter of relationship of the soul to God. Speaking about *Tāyumāṉavar* 's teachings he says that "in the postulate that God and the soul 'are not one, nor yet two', the two teachings, Vēdāntic and Siddhāntic are brought into unison, *camaracam*".[9] The poet expressly speaks of 'the Godly *samarasa* bliss which consists in an affirmation of neither oneness nor twoness'.[10]

Tāyumāṉavar calls this state of awareness as "the bliss in which one does not say what it is (the relation between soul and God). It is neither oneness nor two ness.

Tambiah has quoted passages from P. Muthia Pillai and J.M. Nallaswami Pillai, to show the different standpoints of the two Saivite scholars with regard to the meaning of *camaracam*. Muthia Pillai is said to have stated that *camaracam* is in fact the

acknowledgement of the complementary nature of Vēdānta and Siddhānta. J.M. Nallaswami Pillai prefers the meaning 'impartiality'. He contends that there will be differences of outlook in the six creeds while the *Samaraca* mind recognizes the good that is in each and views all with non-contentions, uncertain 'impartiality'. With regard to Vēdānta and Siddhānta he would notice the *Samaracam* in retaining of their distinctness of the two systems of thought. He quotes *Tirumūlar*'s lines "Vēdānta which says that (the soul) becomes (god) and the Siddhānta which says that (the soul) is distinct..." to support his view.

The observations of all the three scholars are helpful to understand the deeper meaning of the phrase *Samaracam* and the possible ways of its application to the systems of thought. *Samaracam* does point out the fact that there are certain things common to the different systems of thought. The comparable elements do not however point in the direction of complete identity. They maintain their distinct characteristics at all costs and thus provide clues to a deeper understanding of their relationship which can be best understood in terms of 'complementation' and 'impartiality'.

It is to be noted that *Tirumūlar* and *Tāyumānavar* speak of *Samaracam* not at the expense of Saivism but with firm grounding in its basic tenets.

Tirumūlar declares that he who adheres to Vēdānta and Siddhānta which reveal Siva in the supreme space of grace and the soul in its surpassed state as the dancing hall of Siva, will obtain *Sivañānam*, (2356).

Tāyumāṉavar does speak of the *cittars* as those who have known the *Samaracam* of Vēdānta and Siddhānta. He also refers to their pure mystical experience as the *'advaita union'* (293). He also describes them as those who have established themselves in *Sivayōga.* He is faithful to his Saivite convictions. He declares the supremacy of Saivism and its distinctiveness in a famous verse :

Saivism is the real path indeed.
It reveals to you in the Hall Divine
the eternal reality
which is beyond the reach
of all other schools of thought
and makes you attain the same.
Don't you forsake this
and run after religions
which are false.
O people of the world,
Come to join us
so that you will have the vision
of the hall divine. *30-Kādum Karaiyum*

Closely related with the concept of *Samaracam* is *Saṉmārgam* (the true path) in Tamil Saivism. It is the highest of the four *mārgas* spoken in Saiva Siddhanta. *Tirumūlar* upholds this path and declares it as the divine Saivite path (1451). He brings out the Saivite implications of the phrase to the full when he states that *Saṉmārgam* is becoming one with Siva, after one disassociates himself completely with the three mals... Those who have obtained this state will enjoy *Sivañāṉa* (1454). He calls *Saṉmārgam* by the name *taṟcivatattuvam* (knowing Siva as he is in himself') (1450).

Speaking about the *Sanmārgis* he says that they are divine (1455) and they triumph over death (1450).

Voice against Religious Bigotry

The Siddhas were the first ones to raise their voice against various kinds of social injustice prevailing in society with religious sanction. Several of the Tamil Siddhas condemn casteism and Brahmanism. Although they were radical and outspoken in their social attitude, they cannot be considered as social revolutionaries in the real sense of the term. Kamil Zvelebil points out that they did not aim at "the radical structural change of the Hindu society and some of them dreamed of a future when there would be no castes."[11] *Pattirakiriyār* for instance laments : "Oh ! for the day when we shall live without divisions of caste, according to the teachings of the First Kapilar" (125). *Sivavākkiyar* strongly condemns caste distinction and untouchability by plainly affirming "that there is no difference between an outcaste and a Brahmin woman in flesh, skin or bones and that this may be experimented by simply sleeping with both of them" (38). *Sivavākkiyar* is very critical of temple worship and seriously questions the sanctity and venerability of the idols installed therein. He cries :

After all, what are these temples
and the sacred tanks,
Tell me you poor slave
who worship in temples and tanks !
Temples are in the mind
and so also the tanks..... (33)

Why do you utter mantras

murmuring and whispering?
Why do you go round the
erected stone
treating it as God
and adorn it with garlands of flowers?
I pity you !
Will the fixed stone speak
even when the Lord could dwell within?
Will the cooking vessel
know the taste of
the curry cooked in it? (496)

It is not correct to describe the Siddhas as a category of free thinkers with yogic capacities over against the *bhaktas,* who were emotional and adapted themselves to the cultic pattern of temple worship. In fact both yoga and *bhakti* are integrated in the lives and teachings of several Siddhas like *Paṭṭiṉattār* . I quote a stanza from *Sivavākkiyar* to illustrate this truth :

You will never find the Lord
in the pages of the four Vedas.
Nor in the study of these scriptures
nor by chanting of the *mantras.*
Melt with your heart inside only...
and announce the Truth..... (36)

The Siddhas have made their own contributions towards the understanding of *mukti* by the concepts of imperishable body and glorious life without death.

The Tamil Siddhas deserve commendation for the courage with which they fought out religious bigotry of their times and for

paving the way for a counter-tradition with strong anti-cultic and anti-Brahmanic elements. A.V. Subramania Aiyer commends them "for their heroism and strength of convictions".[12]

It will not be out of place here to state that Tamil Saivism itself is claimed to be Siddha Mārga. Tiru Vi. Ka. the great Saivite Tamil scholar, is of the opinion that Siddha Mārga or the spiritual view of the universe held by the Siddhas had spread and prevailed among all the peoples of the world.

The sacred *Tēvāram* which contains the mystical writings of Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar speaks of persons who have adopted the spiritual or religious path in life, broadly into two classes. Those who are striving to see God are *bhaktas,* while those who have already had the supreme privilege of seeing God and obtaining illumination of soul are *Siddhas.* All the Siddhas are alike in their spiritual experience and divine wisdom, but each has his own way of giving expression to his spiritual quest. This is the reason why the Siddhas rise above all religious barriers. Their poetry breathes the spirit of universal love and brotherhood and pleads for an ethical life completely free from sectarian limitations.[12]

It is claimed by Tiru Vi. Ka. and others that great Saivite Saints, namely *Appar, Suntarar, Sambantar* and *Māṇikkavācakar,* who lived between the 6th and 9th centuries, having among other things revived the Siddha Mārga which was declining in the Tamil country. All the four saints have joyfully declared that they were liberated from death and the chain of births by the Lord Siva. According to Saivite tradition and sacred records, these four saints did not die but passed on into direct communion with God and attained deathless life and eternal bliss.

The Siddha Marga of Ramalinga Swamy

Ramalinga's contributions to the tradition of the Tamil *cittars* may be classified under the two broad headings of Religious Experience and Religious Life. The main sources for the teachings of Ramalinga are his numerous poems and pamphlets, together with his treatise on *Jīvakāruṇyam*. A few of the sayings and conversations of Ramalinga recorded by his biographers are also helpful in reconstructing his message.

Religious Experience

Songs of Divine Grace

Ramalinga's *Tiruvaruṭpā* consisting of well over five thousand and eight hundred verses provides us ample material to deduce his spiritual biography. The book is divided into six *tirumuṟais* or sections which are full of *bhakti* poems and lyrics. These were sung by Ramalinga for a period of about thirty-nine years. The first four *tirumuṟais* consisting of 3028 verses were written during his early life in Chennai. This period would extend upto 1858. The fifth *tirumuṟai* consisting of 237 verses was composed between 1858 and 1867. This was the period he resided in Karunkuḻi. Upto this period he was attached to cultic worship and visited several temples including the famous one in Chidambaram. The sixth *tirumuṟai* consisting of 2551 poems was written during the last seven years of his life (1867-74). It is the most remarkable period in his life. During this period Ramalinga was preoccupied with thoughts relating to Siddhahood. He claims to have attained the same in several verses. While making bold proclamations about his exaltation to Siddhahood he offers his invitation to all to join him in this new experience of his. The impact of some of the leading *cittars* like *Tirumūlar* and

Tāyumāṉavar is discernible in his writings of this period. He had contacts with some of the Sadhus and *cittars* of his day and it is quite possible that he widened his knowledge of Siddhahood and deepened his interest in attaining the same through the contacts with the Sadhus. The Siddhic material in this *tirumuṟai* is mixed with the traditional *bhakti* modes of praise, adoration and confession.

Ramalinga did not allow his disciples to publish the sixth *tirumuṟai* during his life time. He thought that the time was not ripe yet. Only the first four *tirumuṟais* were published during his life time in 1867. The fifth was published in 1880 and the sixth in 1885. However, the sixth *tirumuṟai* material might have been read by some of Ramalinga's intimate disciples during his life time. It is interesting tonote that Toḻuvūr Vēlāyutam, Ramalinga's most intimate disciple who had first undertook the publication of *Tiruvaruṭpā* did not ever publish the sixth *tirumuṟai*. As in the case of many other *cittars,* Ramalinga's writings became more popular and widely read only after his life time. It is difficult to arrange the poems of the sixth *tirumuṟai* in their chronological order. An attempt, however, is made by Ūraṉaṭikaḷ in his latest edition of *Tiruvaruṭpā*.

A Bhakta and Siddha

Ramalinga is keen on maintaining his position both as *bhakta* and Siddha. He tries to show the close connection between *bhakti* and *Siddhi* in the poems of the sixth *tirumuṟai*. He seeks to maintain a balance between the two. He shows remarkable talent as a devotional poet in putting the *siddhi* ideas and concepts in *bhakti* poems. He is thoroughly convinced that he comes in the line of both the Saivite poets and the cittars. He believes that his

Lord has granted him a uinque place in the galaxy of the Saivite saints as well as the *cittars*. This prominent position of his is stated clearly in the following two verses :

... You placed me my Lord
at the very centre
in the assembly of your saints-
the Saivites!
As a deity indeed am treated by you
who dance in the Hall of Wisdom. (4800)

... You placed me my Lord
at the very centre
of the holy band of your servants -
the *cittars* !
In the form of wisdom indeed
am brought up by you
while you dance in the Hall. (4801)

Ramalinga is keen on pointing out the mutual interdependence of *bhakti* and *siddhi*. While accepting *siddhi* to be the ultimate goal for spiritual maturity he is never tired of proclaiming that *bhakti* is the sole means for attaining *siddhi:*

People of the world,
focus your thoughts on the Lord
who is self-existent
who is all-pervading
yet different from all-
the Unique Lord!
He is father and mother to me.

He is meditated and praised
by his beloved saints
as the Supreme, the very seed of the Supreme
as the very life of the seed ;
who is choice ambrosia tasting sweet
like sugar mixed with honey.
If you do so,
You will obtain the superb *siddhi*
of living for ages... (5589)

Siddhahood according to Ramalinga is not something that is sought for performing miracles. He would rather live the life of a *bhakta* and live it to the full.

I desire not to die
nor to continue this life
nor even to be born anymore.
I desire not popularity
to be known as great !
Nor do I desire to perform
any miracle to my credit (3400)

... I take delight, my Lord,
in watching your dance
in the Hall of Wisdom
as well as in the Golden Hall,
in singing and dancing daily
and in making happy
the living beings of this world (3401)

These statements are comparable with a verse of *Tirumūlar* which says that the divine light unobtainable by *cittars* had made itself accessible to the *bhaktas* and granted them *mukti.*

(271)

The bestowal of Siddhahood on him

The bestowal of Siddhahood on him is interpreted by Ramalinga as the answer to his prayer for the same to be put in the service of others. In a verse he narrates the words of the Lord spoken to him thus :

...It was your wish to remove all evils
and pave the path of goodness
and enable all attain
true and happy life.
May it be according to your wish
May you exhibit *Siddhis.*
We have made you the dispenser
of the gracious light,
We will never forsake you. (3676)

Apart from *bhakti* he also connects *mukti* and *buddhi* (knowledge) with *siddhi* and seeks to harmonize them all in the life of a *bhakta-siddha.* Speaking about *mukti* he observes it to be the penultimate state which precedes *siddhi* which is the attainment of that final state (4615, 248). The tension that normally exists between *buddhi* and *siddhi* is portrayed in a verse thus:

When I went to see
the divine dance in the Hall
The girl *siddhi*

caught hold of me by hand !
Will *buddhi,* the girl who is already mine
be pleased at it?
or will she stop loving me
and depart me with anger?
Will they both get along nicely
or will they quarrel with each other?
Will they bring forth children for me?
What your holy will about this
is not clear to me, my Lord ! (338)

Direct Experience of God

Like the other *cittars,* Ramalinga is much interested in speaking about his first hand experience of God. He adopts various forms of expression to communicate his inner experience. He follows the patterns set by his predecessors. His poems reveal his familiarity with the *bhakti* as well as the *siddhi* literature. Like *Paṭṭiṉattār* and *Tāyumāṉavar* he combines the style and diction of the *bhakti* poets and the *siddhas.* It may be stated that he distinguished himself as a *siddha* among the *bhaktas* and *bhakta* among the *siddhas.* While narrating his intimate spiritual experiences as a *siddha* he appends them with praises and petitions which abound in the writings of *bhakthi* poets. The following verse from his poem *tiruvaṟuṭpēṟu* (The Gift of Grace Divine) is a fine illustration for such blending:

You made me ascend through the staircase
and reach the city where the supreme dance takes place;
You showed me the temple at the centre of the city
and at the threshold of the temple tower.
You opened the sacred door for me

but closed it before I could enter.

I beseech you to open the door again.
This is the opportune moment.
I cannot wait anymore.
Hasten my Lord - the dancer at the Hall
to bestow your grace on me. (3780)

The first part of the verse speaks of the yogic ascension of the *siddha*. Although the yogic process is not stated elaborately with the conventional terms, it is implied in this part of the verse. The latter part is the cry of a *bhakta* who longs for the experience once again. He requests that the vision may be granted to him again together with the bestowal of divine grace.

Similar cries of aspirations are to be found in the following lines as well :

You gave me the key to open
the chest containing great riches.
I now try to open and take the treasure.
Do not deceive me.
Hasten to bestow your grace. (3781)

You gave me a helping hand
and lifted me up.
You gave me legs
for my enjoyment of the wide world.
Now you should give me
the body that will not perish.
I will not leave you till you grant the same.
Now that I have ascended up
I do not like to descend anymore. (3784)

Crossing all the woods I reached the country
and saw the beautiful sight
of the golden walls of your city !
I saw the flags on top of the forts ;
they added beauty to the sight.
At the entrace of the temple
I got relieved of all infirmities
and I obtained *siddhi*
to control my mischievous sense organs.
I now sing about the Hall of Wisdom !
My Lord,
This is the opportune moment ;
Fill my heart with your very self. (3820)

Ramalinga is fond of narrating the divine vision as well as the experience of the Lord in terms of the 'divine dance in the Hall of Wisdom'. This vision and dance symbolize the divine activity of the indwelling god. The Hall of Wisdom in Chidambaram points to the 'natural bliss', 'the transcendental space' and *Suddha Siva* state. Ramalinga's chief concern in life was to reach that state wherefrom come all *Siddhis*. He sings:

God is One indeed
in the divine Hall of Wisdom
wherefrom comes the light
which gives rise to all *siddhis*. (3270)

Pondering over God's transcendent nature or the *Suddha Siva Veḷi* he pours out his heart to God :

You are beyond the seven spheres ;
the Vedas cannot find your real depth.

You are in those spheres and
You absorb them all in yourself !
You are such a comprehensive sphere!-
the sphere of *Suddha Sivam.* (4157)

Ramalinga also refers to the highest religious experience as obtainable when one passes beyond the six *antas* of *nādānta, kālānta, bōdhānta, yōgānta, vēdānta* and *siddhānta.* The direct experience of God beyond religion is basic to the teachings of Ramalinga. He narrates his own experience of the beyond in many verses. A poem which he has rendered in typical *cittar* style is worth our notice.

(Addressing her friend a young girl joyfully sings narrating her inner experience) :

Look my dear friend !
Upon the clouds I saw
a peacock dancing !
But very soon
it changed its appearance
to a cuckoo

I stopped jumping
and started the search.
I did find the Lord !-
the bestower of grace,
the dancer in the sacred hall.

Now my friend,
I have given up caste and creed,
I have seen for myself
the light of grace !

So my friend,
I have abandoned the unreal
and as I set out
I found my Lord
who dances in the Hall. (4947-4950)

Ramalinga uses the word *podu* 'Common' or 'public' which is one of the names given to the dancing hall of Chidambaram. He is keen on emphasising the deeper meaning of the word along the lines followed by *Tirumūlar* and *Tāyumāṉavar*. *Tirumūlar* brings out the universal aspect of *podu* and *ciṟṟampalam* by stating that every place is Chidambaram in its own right and that the divine dance is to be seen everywhere, (2722). *Tāyumāṉavar* states in his *citampara rakasiyam* (14.12) that people of all religions come to worship in Chidambaram. Ramalinga during the last seven years of his life was keen on preaching about the Lord's dance in the form of light is to be seen in the Sabai at Vaṭalūr. He goes on to say that Vaṭalūr is a better place for his dance. One of his popular lyrics brings out the idea :

All the songs I sing are songs
on the dancing hall divine -
the golden as well as the subtle one. (5793)

The universal aspect of *podu* is linked up with the diverse manifestations of God stressed by Ramalinga. It is interesting to see how in a poem written in the form of a conversation between two girls, he brings out the point. One of them represents the *bhakta-siddha* who is married to the Lord. She is awaiting his arrival. In the meantime her friend asks her several questions. One of the questions relates to the name of the husband - Lord. The reply comes from the soul wedded to the Lord thus :

You're asking my friend
to tell you my husband's name,
Now listen !
His name is Arhat, Buddha, the Ancient,
Indra, Narayana, Hara, Ādi Siva,
Sada Siva, Sakthi Sivam, Param
Brahman, suddha Brahman,
Turia, Suddha Siva.
All these are his siddhic manifestations ! (5801)

Ramalinga uses often the analogy of light to describe the nature of divine grace. This concept is cherished in yogic teachings. But Ramalinga does not elaborate the yogic process like several other siddhas.He does reveal his acquaintance with the yoga of breath control practised by raising the *kuṇṭaliṉi* through the six *ādhāras* and drinking the ambrosia or nectar. He makes reference to the ambrosia in several verses, especially the ones arranged under the title *Sivayōgam.*

I have crossed the sea of *māya*
and reached the shore
where the greatness of grace is found.
There I drank the sweet ambrosia (3864)

Open the door
you who love me
with a new love !
My Siva, the dançer king !
So that-
I may drink the nectar of the moon
and rule over the sphere of your Lordship(3832)

'ambrosia of grace'	(3833)
'ambrosia which offers deathlessness'	(3834)
'ambrosia which gives knowledge'	(3836)
'ambrosia of the Hall of Wisdom'	(5598)
'ambrosia which is preferred to in the Vedas as the powerful *siddhi'*	(3837)
' the sweet ambrosia which is to be found above the seven states'	(3836)
'the clear ambrosia'	(5589)
'the sacred ambrosia at the top of the mountain of light'	(3841)

Only once in his writings Ramalinga uses the term 'sahaja'. In a verse included in the fifth *tirumuṟai* he says:

What you have done to me is a wonder.
How shall I narrate it ?
You imparted knowledge to me
an ignorant lad.
You showed me the beginning and end
and several other states.
You showed me the mystery
relating to the bliss of the Siddhas.
You showed me the state of deathlessness
and the state of *sahaja*.
You showed the place
where my mind got dissolved in you
and made me happy !

None has the power of your grace ! (3038)

The contrast between the direct experience of God and the knowledge of God through the means of philosophy and religion is brought out sharply in the writings of Ramalinga. He adopts the metre used by *Kutampaic cittar,* in one of his poems, to convey this truth.

Dialogue with the heart

To behold him who is beyond time
Why should you care for time at all?
my good heart,
why should you?

To behold the Lord directly
no obstacle is set before you
my good heart,
none indeed.

To drink the nectar you have in your hand
why should you feel sorry at all
my good heart,
why should you?
To behold the master who transcends all *tattvas*
Why should you consider *tattvas* any more?
my good heart,
why should you?
We have drunk the ambrosia well
So we will not hycough
my good heart,
we will never ! (4287-4296)

Charismatic Gifts

Ramalinga's writings in the sixth *tirumurai* abound with statements relating to certain occasions in his life when he was blessed with special privileges and charismatic gifts. These include visions, special instructions, bestowal of honours and *siddhis*.

Visions of the Lord Siva and miraculous encounters with him were recurring features in the life of Ramalinga even from the days he spent in Chennai. Later during his early years in Karunkuli he was granted a vision in Chidambaram temple while he stood weeping at the gate. He speaks of a particular encounter with his Lord in Cuddalore when he appeared to him while he was sleeping in his room. Opening the door the Lord entered the room and gave a certain thing in his hand and urged him to relieve himself of all miseries. He sings about this in a long poem now included in the fourth *tirumurai*. According to some verses in the sixth *tirumurai* he had siddhic visions more than once and was taught yoga and *siddhis* directly by the Lord.

On one evening
You did teach me yoga
in one *nalikai*
and granted me
the fruits of yoga
the next morning. (4993)

While I slept one day on ground
exhausted in body and confused in mind
pondering your grace
and forgetting the world

and all its affairs,
you, my guru, came near me at day break
and woke me up.

Addressing me as 'son' you said :
'It is not good that you perish
without following the paths of yoga or *Jnāna*-
So get up! Work them out!
Drink the ambrosia of grace'. (3674)

From the above two verses it becomes clear that he developed the desire for yoga and at a particular stage realized for certain that he was a yogi taught and approved by the Lord himself.

Another vision of his is to the effect of the Lord merging into him.

One night
You, my guru, appeared to me
in your form of wisdom.
Embracing me you entered into me.
Relieving me of all misery
You are now seated firmly in my heart. (3675)

In another verse he connects an earlier vision at Chidambaram with a fresh one he had in Vaṭalūr and speaks of further bestowal of grace.

I stood in a corner on that day
at the entrance of the sacred hall
pondering on your grace.
Remembering the gracious words

you spoke to me on that occasion
I waited for the blessed day
and spent many days in expectation.
And today,
as soon as I told you
'this day would be auspicious
to show your grace to me'
you bestowed the same on me.
Great indeed is your love in this world! (4756)

Ramalinga states that he was taught everything in a moment by the Lord who places his feet on his head (4182) and that his soft nature of fear and worries of sorrow is transformed into a bold and happy state. (4985)

According to tradition most of the Tamil *cittars* were encountered by the Lord in the form of a guru and they were initiated into yoga. But they do not say much about that experience in their writings. Ramalinga is following the example of *Tāyumāṉavar* who constantly mentions and praises the *mounaguru* who imparted divine knowledge to him. Ramalinga says that he sees visions in his heart.

I have given up all evil
and drank your ever flooding grace.
I see visions in my heart-
Visions I have never seen before... (3892)

Ramalinga proclaims that the rare visions granted to him and the special grace bestowed on him by the Lord have raised him to the status of a divine being by virtue of which state he was made to be the Lord's emissary on the earth uttering the very

words of the Lord. Speaking about the attainment of divinity Ramalinga says :

You made me my Lord
ascend to heights unthinkable,
endowed me with powers divine
and shown me blessed visions
hitherto kept unrevealed.
You are indeed the supreme dancer
and the crown-head of all Siddhas. (4763)

Ramalinga affirms that *siddhi* is a divine quality and it is directly received from Siva whom he calls 'the crown head of all siddhas'. He believes in divine commission received by the siddhas and particularly in his case :

You my guru made me fit
with the bestowal of grace on me ;
by commissioning me with your own word
to perform all *siddhis*. (3665)

"Since
the evil path made up of
manifold religions and sects
has extended itself so far,
those who do not know the true path
had gone into absolute darkness
having died many a time.
So discard the evil path.
and build the path of *Sanmārga*
which bestows the divine ambrosia
of the path open to all."

Thus you spoke to me, O Nataraja,
my master and king. (3696)

This leads him to proclaim that the father-son relationship is maintained between the Lord and himself. He claims himself to be the dearest son of the Lord :

I am the son of the Gracious Siddha
who is praised by all the liberated Ones. (5593)

Speaking to the Lord he says, "You made me your pet child" (3895 ; 4057). He states that his adoption to divine sonship is preceded by his drinking of the ambrosia (4059-61). Ramalinga as the dearest and unique son of the Lord endeavours to establish that his message is literally the message coming from the Lord. In a verse written at a time when his message was not accepted at large he says :

My friends,
It is my firm belief that
the words I speak are in fact
the words of the Lord.
This is the opportune time
to meet the Lord who is to come-
the divine dancer-
and attain gifts he bestows
graciously.
The Sacred Hall dancer
has become my own self ;
He is not 'he' anymore,
nor am I 'I' any longer.
The words I speak are

the words of my Lord who speaks through me.
They are not my own ! (5502, 5503)

He makes his sonship to be attested by the words of his Lord when he says in a verse that the Lord had confirmed the truth thus :

The words you speak my son
for correcting the people of this world
are of course my words ! (3679)

His unique status is further described by him as being an all-powerful siddha with divine commission to do the five great divine deeds of creation, protection, dissolution, *tirodhānam* (hiding) and *anugraham* (bestowal of grace).

In 18 verses he states that the Lord has entirely left at his disposal the five divine deeds or commissioned him to perform the acts. (3948, 4045)

Ramalinga claims that he attained the gift of making gold. His first disciple Toḻuvūr Vēlāyutam in his testimony to the Theosophical Society has stated that Ramalinga was a great alchemist. Ramalinga speaks of his achievement in alchemy of transforming baser metal into gold in only one verse. He is specific in stating that this was a gift and it was taught by the Lord.

... You taught me the means
of making gold
and came to reside in my heart... (3962)

In his correspondence with Ratna Mudaliar, Ramalinga asks him to send him testing stones of gold and silver together with a scale, and also acknowledges the receipt of the same. He writes in the letter that the matter should be kept secret.

The *Siddhi* par excellence achieved by Ramalinga in *Kāyasiddhi* according to the hundreds of references made in the sixth *tirumurai*. A number of verses are written requesting the Lord to bestow on him the *siddhi* of deathlessness or obtaining *mukti* along with the body. These verses are scattered all along in the sixth *tirumurai* and it is difficult to see them in the chronological order as there is no internal evidence to mark clearly the stages of the spiritual life. Ramalinga declares in many verses that he has obtained the *suddha, pranava* and *jnāana* bodies. He sings :

You my great gracious Light have given me the power
to obtain the three types of bodies. (Akaval, 237, 238)

He also calls the *suddha deha, svarna deha* and body of life.

I have got my body
which is affected by age
changed into a golden body. (4096)

Truly I have obtained the golden body. (4832)

I have learnt the culture of *cirrampalam*
and have obtained the body of light... (4833)

My Lord the divine dancer
entered into me
and bestowed upon me

the true light which is his grace
and lifted me up.
He has changed my body
to the present resplendent state !
How shall I narrate this in words? (3863)

The three bodies are together referred to as imperishable or eternal bodies. Ramalinga states in many verses that the *mukti* obtained by him is nothing less than that.

You granted me the body
which will by no means be destroyed. (3867)

I have obtained
the imperishable and divine form. (3896)

Tāyumāṉavar has sung in praise of the siddhas who have obtained the three fold *siddhi* of having transformed their bodies into the three states of *suddha, pranava* and *jnāna :*

So many indeed are those
who have obtained *mukti*
with the threefold Siddhis. (*Parāparakkaṇṇi* 209)

According to Ramalinga the attainment of *Suddha deha* gives the form of light ; and *pranava deha* gives the form of sound, the *deha* of *jnana* gives celestial form or form of grace. Sundarar is said to have achieved the *suddha deha* while Sampandar, Appar and *Paṭṭiṉattār* are said to have achieved the *pranava deha*. *Māṇikkavācakar* and Ramalinga are said to have obtained the *jnāna deha*.

While narrating his experience of achieving the siddhic body of the highest order Ramalinga says that in answer to his

request the Lord has transformed his sinful body into the form of bliss (3854), nature (3855), grace (56) and Siva (3861).

This achievement is otherwise spoken as victory over death or deathlessness :

The great gracious light
bestowed on me
the boon of deathlessness.
The great gracious Light
said to me:
We have given you the deathless life (209-10)

I have seen the father
and have attained
the gift of deathlessness ! (4903)

... I am bestowed with
the gift of deathlessness
and I have got over
the fear of death. (4731)

I asked for a body
that could not be destroyed
by wind or earth or air
by fire or water or luminaries
by death, or disease or weapons
by planets or other evil influences
or by any other means.
He granted the same immediately!... (5450)

Ramalinga is not merely satisfied with the *deha suddhi* he has obtained. He is persuading the people to obtain the same :

You people have not known the Light Eternal
since you did not make any effort at it.
You have not found the ways and means
to stop death and birth either...
Closing your eyes you move about
and offer nothing to those
who beg in your streets.
You mad people of the world !
Do you profit anything in your lvies? (5558)

He stresses the importance of *bhakti* as the means for attaining *kāya siddhi* :

Come you people of the world !
Let us together praise him saying,
'You are our beloved Lord, the dancer king divine
and the sweet ambroisa of grace!"
With constant thought and abounding emotion
With melted hearts filled to the brim with love
let us wet our bodies with spring like tears.
Then we shall live the glorious life without death.
Listen ! I do not exaggerate anything ;
nor do I tell lie. I speak the truth.
This is the opportune time for you
to enter the golden hall
as well as the subtle hall of wisdom. (5376)

Ramalinga says that his new and modified path of *Suddha Samarasa Sanmārgam* is the path that destroys death. The *Sanmārgi* for him is the one who does not taste death. Only *Sanmārgis* are entitled to attain the state of deathlessness.

If you postpone your days
to learn the truth,
death the great enemy will arrive!
You can't prevent its coming.
Excepting the *Sanmārga Sangamites*
none in all the world can come forward boldly
to drive death away.
You people of the world,
listen to my words which are true.
Give up completely
the things which you are attached to now.
Cling to the divine hall of dance with love.
Then you will never taste death. (5599)

When you see the bodies of the dead
taken to be disposed
you lament and cry aloud !
But you, people of the world,
why can't you attain
the great gift of deathlessness?
You have completely forgotten this.
Are you happy with
disease and old age?
The gentle ones will shudder at this thought.
The great path of *Sanmārga* alone
will keep away disease, old age and death.

Do understand this and come hither friends !
You will attain in no time
eternal life here and now.
True happiness will be yours indeed. (5600)

Ramalinga would not tolerate dead bodies cremated. He believed in raising of the dead bodies back to life. Strangely enough he speaks of the resurrection of the body and 'the coming of the Lord'. He seems to have borrowed these concepts from Christianity and Islam. Ūraṉaṭikaḷ acknowledges the fact that these ideas are new to the Saivite as well as the Siddhi traditions. Ramalinga's arguments against the practice of burning the dead are interesting although not convincing :

Do not Cremate

When the child is born
you bathe it
and bring it up with utmost care.
But when someone dies
you cremate the corpse.
You are devilish !
How did you consent
to take to this practice?
You put fire on those
who slept in the night
and forgot to get up in the morning.
What 'powerful' (!) people you are !

You are only worthy to be praised
as people whose hearts are hard
as 'precious diamond' (!) rocks!

Why were you born
and why do you move about
calling yourselves
'human beings'! (5608)

It is crime to cremate

This body of ours is God given.
It is a crime
to cremate the same.
Although I warn you
you continue to cremate.
The blessed day is at hand
When the Siddha-Lord
will raise all who are dead.
Won't you understand this
and see the reason why
the good people always buried their dead?
You are like cows that are blind ! (5608)

Ramalinga proclaims in his *akaval* that the *siddhis* bestowed upon him include *karma, yōga* and *jnāna siddhis* (239-246). *Karma siddhi* according to a recorded teaching of his includes the *aṣṭamācittikaḷ* (the eight great *siddhis*) and raising the dead body before it is buried. *Yōga siddhi* makes the siddha a *parāparamārgi* with powers to raise the burnt corpse before its decaying state. When a siddha obtains the *jnāna siddhis* he is able to have at his disposal the sixty-four thousand *saktis* and 686 crores of *maha siddhis.* He passes beyond time and is marked with the highest kind of *siddhis* which are called the *suddha karma, sudha yōga* and *suddha jnāna siddhis.*

Ramalinga makes his request for the boon of raising the dead in a number of verses. In a verse he makes the request thus;

... I should raise the dead and make them the servants of holy Sabai ;

... I also request for the state being one with you
my father with the imperishable body. (4082)

He also states in a number of places in the sixth *tirumuṟai* that he is given the divine gift of raising the dead to life. He is convinced that deathlessness and raising the dead go together. Only those who have attained *kaya siddhi* can raise the dead. The great Saivite Saints Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar are said to have raised the dead on certain occasions in their lives. Ramalinga emphatically affirms in a verse that as a result of his austerities he has obtained the double gifts of deathlessness and the power to raise the dead. He adds that he is completely satisfied with his achievements and longs for nothing :

I am bestowed with two gifts,
namely the *jnāna* fulfillment
of bringing back to life
those who are dead in this world...
and the gift of deathlessness
to live in prosperity for ages.
I have given up the fear of death.
I am satisfied with my present state.
I am rewarded for my austerities. (4731)

In a few verses he emphasises that raising the dead is an eschatological phenomenon which is linked up with the coming of

the Lord. The following verse is worth noting. He speaks to his doubting and perturbed mind by way of confirming the hope he cherished in his heart

Do not be afraid my heart !
This is the time for the Father to come.
Do not doubt it anymore.
Keep on proclaiming this truth to the people of the world.
Your words will not become null and go void.
I swear on my God.
It is certain that we will raise the dead
rejoicing in the state of the great gracious form of light
while being praised by all the inhabitants
of this world, the heaven and the beyond !
Do not be afraid my heart ! (4875)

In another verse he states that it will be the Father, who on his coming to the world, will raise the dead rather than himself.

Reach this place quickly
you people of the world.
The invitation I make is true indeed ;
don't take that to be a false one.
This is the opportune time
for the all-powerful Siddha-Lord to come
to exhibit his great powers
by making the aged renew their youth
and by raising the dead to life.
If you accept the invitation
You will be much benefited. (5583)

It is stated in another verse that "the Lord is coming today and he would be seated in the place where I am ; within two and half years he will be absorbed into my body. You will know this after two and half years" (5818)

He prescribes the way of *bhakti* again as the means of preparing to meet the Lord in the same verse thus :

So,
with hearts melting in love
eyes filled with rolling tears
meditate on the Lord, the gracious divine dancer,
experiencing the joyful state of ecstacy. (5583)

He also states that the coming of the Lord will be the time for him to be fed with nectar and the occasion to see visions which he had not been granted thus far.

Do come here, you people of earth.
Know that this is the time
for my father to come!
The time for him to feed me with churned nectar
of superior quality-
the time to show me
the vision hitherto not shown.
Don't you roam about unwittingly.
You can certainly obtain the joy
that is mine now.
I do not treat you as different
from my own self.
Get up and realize your good selves.
Do not stay any more

in the broken cistern of religion!... (5586)

Ramalinga's contributions to Tamil Siddhic thoughts include in particular his eschatological statements about the coming of the Father and the subsequent raising of the dead. Ūraṉaṭikaḷ 1 acknowledges that these are ideas new to Tamil siddhic or Saivite traditions. It is quite possible that Ramalinga had come into contact with the teachings of Christianity and Islam and borrowed these concepts from those faiths. In all his endeavours to foster the Tamil Siddhic tradition he is keen on stating his unique position and achievements. Although his claims regarding the achievement of the *siddhi* to raise the dead were not put into print during his life time, people from nearby and far off places have come to know about his fame as a siddha and yōgi and approached him with requests of healing and raising their dead back to life. Ramalinga obviously never raised the dead during his life time. Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ records in his diary, written in 1910 that when he visited Vaṭalūr, he came to know through reliable sources that Ramalinga never performed miracles. In one of the pamphlets the Swamy released in an uncontrollable situation, he made his position clear :

> We are not sure whether a miracle is going to take place of not nor can we be sure of its happening now or at some other time in the future. So be on your guard and do not be deceived.

Spirituality According to Ramalinga

Like many other Tamil *cittars* Ramalinga denounces the cultic practices. Although he is not anti-cultic to the core, he stresses the importance of puritanic religion against the cultic. He would not completely break away from cultic worship as did many other *cittars*. He is chiefly concerned in popularising his

conviction that the Lord's dancing place is not confined exclusively to Chidambaram. This he does by stating the equal importance of Vaṭalūr or even by showing that the *jnāna sabai* that he has built at Vaṭalūr transcends the other cultic places of worship. He has taken seriously the aspects of God as Light and God as Love and has set up the pattern of worshipping God in the form of light. He was, at an earlier stage, i.e., before setting up the *sabai,* keen on emphasizing the importance of idol worship. He participated in discussion with Seethara Naickar, a Brahmo Samajist on the subject of idol worship in Cuddalore. According to the recorded statements of his disciples, cited by Ūraṉaṭikaḷ , he won the debate. There seems to be another version of the event. This is stated in an article written in rationalistic *Kudiaraṣu* run by Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy. Ramalinga follows several of the Tamil *cittars* in condemning anti-sectarianism. He prescribes his new-found path of *Samarasa Suddha Saṉmārgam* laying great emphasis on *Jīvakāruṇyam.*

(a) *The limitations of the Scriptures and Sastras*

It is his conviction that the Scriptures do not reveal the truth as it is but twist the same in presenting them to us. Although this tendency is typical of Tantrism, Ramalinga does not speak of the Tantric scriptures as being helpful in understanding the truth. The influence of Tamil *cittars,* including Tirumūlar and *Sivavākkiyar* is immense upon him although he does not acknowledge the same in his writings. His critical attitude to the scriptures can be traced back to the Tantric teachings through the Tamil *cittar* tradition which owes much to Tantrism.

Ramalinga proclaims that he was taught by the Lord the truth regarding *Vedas, Agamas, Itihasas* and *Puraṇas* and their cunning teachings.

> You have shown me
> the path of Vedas and Agamas ;
> the paths prescribed
> by the *Puraṇas* and *Itihasas ;*
> and thereby the cunningness implicit in them,
> You have made me understand the truth
> by your direct instruction. (3767)

While speaking about the *Sāstras,* he comes out with the same criticism. He adds that the Sāstras only cause confusion. He contends that they are in no way comparable with the supreme vision of the Lord.

He proclaims that the Lord had finally taught him that all scriptures are false and futile. The Lord told him :

> "My son, know the truth that all scriptures are deceptive.
> See the deeds by the light of grace..

The Lord tells him again :

> "We have told you that the *Vedas* and *Agamas* are deceptive; the meanings of words and commentaries are lies.. Learn the truth that the *Vedas* and *Agamas* known to the world are sheer lies..."

However, Ramalinga pleads in one of his discourses that only in Hindu Vedas and Agamas are taught *jnāna siddhi.* He argues that no other religion teaches these *siddhis* and

deathlessness. If such teachings are to be found in them they owe their origin to Hinduism.

While making his comment on these attitudes of Ramalinga, Ūraṉaṭikaḷ says that Ramalinga did not completely accept the teachings of the *Vedas* and *Agamas* ; nor did he reject them in full. He adds that this attitude of Ramalinga represents *the clarity of mind of a matured* Saiva Siddhanta *Sanmārgi* and *jnāni.*

(b) Caste, Creed and Sectarianism

Ramalinga speaks from his personal experience when he says that he was taught by the Lord that sectarian groups and their activities are childish affairs. In his earlier years he was brought up as a staunch Saivite and he had become a radical Saivite particularly during the last seven years of his life when he was branded as a heretic by the orthodox Saivites. He sings boldly;

My Lord,
You instructed and told me
that many a sectarian group
founded for personal interests
and the stories told in such groups,
the way of salvation shown in them,
the visions and the deities upheld in them
are all nothing but childish affairs ! (4173)

He further adds in another verse that he was instructed by the Lord to understand the truth that caste and colour distinctions are sheer myth.

the four *varnas, asramas*
the *Puraṇas* and the rest of them
are all childish affairs indeed.
None understands well
the myth of caste and colour distinction.
Arise and see this for yourself !
Thus you instructed me ! (4174)

Speaking about the distinctions made between the various castes as low and high, Ramalinga comes out with his new teaching related to the coming of the Lord :

You fail to see the fact
that only those who are free
from old age and death
belong to the good caste.
You people of the world
speak of high caste and low caste.
You do see people belonging to both castes die.
Know for certain that all these polluted castes
are nothing but filthy worms.

'The time has now arrived
for the advent of my father.
Come, therefore, to drink the fresh nectar
and become people of purified caste.(5572)

Ramalinga denounces extensively in numerous verses the religious life based on caste and creed. In his recorded teachings

he stresses that caste and creed distinctions are great impediments to improve compassion. In the small prayer which he wrote for the use of his followers he brings in a clause of petition in which grace is asked for to be freed from the "clutches of sects, religions and mārgas".

He praises the Lord who is Gracious Light and Unique Compassion as the one who is not understood by castes, religions and sects (*akaval* 115-116). He states that he was made to ascend to the highest in his spiritual form when he was freed from caste, subcaste and religion.

He calls the Lord 'the close relative' of those who have given up caste and creed.

He rebukes those who would engage themselves in vain disputes and controversies relating to the superiority of their sects over the others.

Professing various faiths
you expound the false Sāstras
and shout saying :
'He is our God' 'He is our God'.
But you fail to see that God is one.
You are wiser indeed than those blind men
who touched the elephant and disputed !
When this body composed of five elements perishes
what will you do ?
You do not know the means
to make the perishable body imperishable.

This is the time for the coming of my beloved father.
Salvation for you has come now.
Receive the same and rejoice. (5570)

Ramalinga condemns superstitious beliefs entertained in the established religion. In one of his verses he says that his divine mission includes destroying of such beliefs while establishing *Saṉmārgam* on earth :

My Lord,
You desired indeed
to bury under earth
the foolish superstitions
which take the fictitious elements
in the *Puraṇas* to be true
and establish *Saṉmārgam*
at the same time.
Lord,
You endowed me with the gift of your grace
to accomplish this your purpose. (3768)

Ramalinga's attack on cultic practices is also seen in the verses in which he condemns worship of petty deities and the practice of offering sacrifices to them. He declares that he was taught by the Lord that all the gods of the Hindu pantheon and the founders of religion have their own limitations and they are mere children compared to the One Lord who is gracious light :

"Brahmas, Rudras, Narayanas and Indras
together with the founders of faiths
like Arhat and Buddha
form only a small group of children,

who have emerged from celestial spheres
and obtained only a little light of grace
and moved about here and there
on heaven and earth
tasting the honey that was available.
Know this through the gracious Light!"
    Thus you taught me, my guru,
    the dancer king! (4178)

In his view the band of petty gods does not merely include the local deities of popular Hinduism but also the whole of the so-called higher gods of Hinduism.

Ramalinga like Sivavākkiyar condemns the practice of offering sacrifices to the local deities. During his days he encountered this practice almost at every village temple. He calls such temples the noble temples of the evil-natured petty gods. He says that he was terrified at the sight of such temples.

Like *Tirumūlar* and some other Tamil *cittars,* Ramalinga stresses the importance of non-killing as an essential aspect of the religious life he recommends in the name of *suddha Sanmārgam.* He would not accept meat-eaters and those who kill living beings for the purpose of eating, as members of his inner circle. He would broadly classify human beings as meat-eaters and non-meat-eaters. The former are from the inner circle and the latter the outer circle.

Like *Paṭṭinattār* and other *cittars,* Ramalinga sets the religious life as opposed to the worldly life. But he does not attempt to speak extensively about the physical and deplorable condition of the body and the sex life. He speaks of the temporal

and impermanent nature of human life in contrast to the glorious life without death. Stating the impermanence of life as a life in which the relatives, parents and others, wealth and worldly affairs, are not any real help, he persuades people to take to the *bhakti* way of life. He denounces, in strong words, the sophisticated and cruel life lived by the elites in society. He makes prophetic rebukes at them and pleads with them to change their way of life. The following verses are typical of such rebukings. Ramalinga adopts the tone of *Sivavākkiyar* and *Paṭṭiṉattār* in these verses.

You are mad people!
You say that you live in abundance
but would not care to think of the Lord
with eagerness of mind and eye.
You move about wearing fine garments
with attendants at your service ;
but would not even look at
the poor and hungry who come to you... (5556)

Your life is made up with utter lies.
You do not realize
that when your bodies foul and unreal
are knocked by death
you will go to hell as worthless worms.
You make fun of those
who stand before you in humility
with mouth closed
and hands folded in respect.
You do not have compassion at all!
You are meaner than the flies

that sit on eatables dropped down.
Do you profit anything?
You mad people of the world! (5564)

You commit evils unimaginable,
speak evil words hitherto not known
seek the company of undesirable people
and love to lead the most vicious kind of lives.
You would not think of the Lord
who protects you as the apple of his eye.
You would not seek him with tears !
A time will come when for the first time
you will think of those things
which you avoided all through.
And now,
do you profit anything?
You mad people of the world ! (5565)

(c) Sanmārgam

According to Ramalinga, religious life par excellence is *Suddha Sanmārga*. Taking the concept of *Sanmārga* from Saivism he modifies the same and prescribes a way of life which transcends the nature of *Sanmārga m* in Saivism. His whole message is summarised in *Suddha Sanmārgam* which is claimed to be the path that destroys death. Ramalinga might be called the *Siddha of Sanmārgam*. He contends that reality is known only through *Sanmārga*. Speaking to his Lord he says:

You told me my Lord
that the reality explained by
Vēdānta, Siddhānta and other *antas*

could be known only in the state of
Suddha Shiva Sanmārga,
through great light of grace
and not by any other means. (4179)

On the basis of this conviction he makes his appeal to the people of the world in numerous verses to follow the path of *Sanmārga.*

Impermanent indeed is everything you saw.
Defective of course, are all that you heard.
Unreal after all, is everything you learnt.
Vain indeed, are all your happiness.
You ate nothing but filth
and devoured foul food !
You worldly people
You have failed miserably
to see the truth.
No matter what you have done in the past,
obtain my father's grace
at the great dancing Hall of Wisdom
following the true path
which is *Samarasa Sanmārga*
and thus grasp clearly,
the nature of reality.
You will be rewarded indeed
with the gift of deathlessness
and you will attain joy divine. (5579)

It is in the context of *Suddha Sanmārga* life Ramalinga speaks of worshipping the Lord in the form of gracious light and love. This kind of worship is prescribed as worshipping the Lord

in the *jnāna Sabai* which is set in Vaṭalūr. Also it is for the purpose of propagating the path of *Sanmārga* that he organized in 1865 the *Samarasa Veda Sanmārga Sangam.* In the tradition of the Tamil Saiva saints and Siddhas, Ramalinga is the first one to organize a *Sangam* over against the traditional *maṭam* where membership is confined to a few privileged people. Ramalinga's *Sangam* is wider in scope and offers membership to all who accept to follow *Sanmārga.* While explaining the meaning of the nature of the *Sangam,* Ramalinga says that *Samarasa Vēda Sanmārga Sangam* means 'the assembly of those who followed the fourth path which is the conclusion of the book of wisdom, which is common to all religions'. He planned to write a book with the title *Samarasa Vēdam.* Unfortunately it was not written. If he had written the same it would have revealed his mind. He states that all margas are the same and makes on appeal to people to join his *Sanmārga Sangam.* He was absolutely certain about his path soon becoming an accepted *mārga.* The members of *Sangam* are called *Sadhus,* meaning *Sadhakas,* "those who practice sadhana". As observed earlier, the main objectives of the *Sangam* are teaching and practice of *Jīvakāruṇyam* and abolition of the following : meat-eating, temple sacrifices, superstitious beliefs, *jati* and *varna* differences and realising the oneness of all souls in love *(Ānmanēya Orumaippāṭu)* together with the inculcation of the glorious life without death.

Ramalinga made it plain to the masses that the President of the *Sangam* was the Lord himself and those who have *Arul* or compassion were its members.

Ramalinga may be called the *Sanga Siddha* among the Tamil Siddhas. He made efforts to impart his Siddhic teachings

through the organisational set up of the *Sangam*, whose main task was to take the message of *Sanmārga* to the common people.

Ramalinga gives a prominent place to compassion and treating of all lives as one's own in his *Sanmārgam*. This concept is further expounded in his treatise *Jīvakāruṇyam Olukkam* love and goodwill towards all creatures.

(d) Jīvakāruṇyam

It is an important concept in Saivism. *Tiruvaḷḷuvar* who is claimed to be a Saivite[12] has emphasized abstience from killing and meat-eating. *Tirumūlar* also has given much importance to these in Saiva ethics. This aspect of Saiva ethics is so well known to the people of Tamil Nadu that they use the term Saivam in ordinary speech to refer to vegetarianism. Professor P. Mutharasu[13] points out that *Jīvakāruṇyam* can otherwise be called *Ahimsa Dharma*. Dr. B. Natarajan[14] observes that it is what Buddha called compassion and Christ described as love. Professor V.A. Devasenapati[15] equates it with the concept of love in the writings of Albert Schweitzer. In several respects the concept is similar to agape (the self-giving love) spoken of in the New Testament. St. Paul's exposition of Love and the thought-provoking statements of St. John in his first epistle are worth comparing with *Jīvakāruṇyam*.[16]

Ramalinga explains the necessity and purpose of *Jīvakāruṇyam* in his treatise on the subject with the following words :

> The purpose of *Jīvakāruṇya Olukkam* ('observance of love towards all beings') is to remove suffering that results from hunger and killing of living beings. It should be realized that God has manifested himself in nature, in the very bodies of

the living beings. When they are found to be destroyed, we should, out of *Jivakarunyam* give them food and thus make those temples of the Lord shine forth in splendour.

While maintaining that one enters *Suddha Sanmārga* by the mere practice of *Jīvakāruṇyam*. Ramalinga also describes how the *Sanmargi* reaches the highest state of *Suddha Sanmārga* by passing beyond several steps of spiritual experience.

Ramalinga teaches that the *Sanmargi* has to go beyond six antas or ends, and so he further defines *Suddha Sanmārga* as *ṣaṭānta Suddha Sanmārga*. The six antas mentioned by him are *yōgānta, kālānta, nādānta, bōdhānta, vēdānta* and *siddhānta*. Some of these are classified in Saiva Siddhānta as *Siva tattvas*.

The *sādhaka* reaches *yōgānta* by entering into *dhyāna yōga*. From there he proceeds to *kālānta*. At this state he is enabled to distinguish true wisdom from false and deceptive knowledge. He realises the worthlessness and illusory character of various religions and rituals. He also gets the knowledge of *Sanmārga*. He proceeds to the attainment of *nādānta* and realises the state of Siva as *Om*.

The *sādhaka* then attains *bōdhānta* where Siva appears to him in the form of light. The *jyoti darsana* gives bliss to the soul. Ramalinga has written a number of verses on the *bōdhānta* state where God is seen in the form of light. He describes this state as being within the reach of all. He formulated the watchwords *Aruṭperum Jōti ; Tanipperum karuṇai* (Hail supreme Grace Light ; Hail unique Compassion) as an aid for the common man to contemplate on this state. The *jōti darsana* arranged at the *Jnāna Sabai* is also indicative of this.

The *Sādhaka* has to go beyond in his spiritual pilgrimage from *bōdhānta* to *vēdānta*. At this state he will find Siva to be pure wisdom. When he passes beyond *Vedanta* to *Siddhānta*, he will come to realize his oneness of *Suddhadvaita* state with God. The sadhāka then becomes *Sadhya*.

Ramalinga prays to the Lord to grant him and to all others this experience. He sings :

> Those who practise *yōga, tapas, vrata, japa* and *dhyāna* without *Jīvakāruṇyam* are not enlightened beings in the real sense of the term. They are hypocrites.

Since hunger is basic to all human suffering, those who hasten to remove it are indeed blessed persons. Ramalinga appeals to the rich to minimise expenditure on luxurious celebrations and contribute liberally for the cause of feeding the poor.

The importance of non-killing is also emphasized by Ramalinga. He vehemently condemns animal sacrifices. On the basis of non-killing Ramalinga advocates the observance of vegetarianism. He considers those who indulge in killing and meat-eating as immature beings as far as the spiritual life is concerned. He sings :

> Those who kill and those who consume flesh do not belong to us. They are aliens...

Jīvakāruṇyam is affirmed by Ramalinga as a universal principle. He seeks to build upon it the brotherhood of all men which he calls *Āṉmanēya Orumaippāṭu* ('Oneness of Soul in Love'). The various *asramas, acaras* and controversies in matters concerning caste and sect are found to be stumbling blocks for

the free exercise of *Jīvakāruṇyam* in this world. Ramalinga makes a universal appeal to all people to free themselves from these evils and practice *Jīvakāruṇyam* which is the only prerequisite for entering into *Suddha Sanmārga* or the True Path for attaining grace.

The way of life governed and motivated by *Jīvakāruṇyam* is described by Ramalinga as *Suddha Sanmārga*. He commends this path for all, although it is prescribed in Saiva Siddhanta for the spiritually matured. Ramalinga is keen that *Suddha Sanmārga* should not be confused with any secret creed. He sings:

> Many a kind of religion and many a creed has thus far spread as sinful tenets. They have been hindrances for attaining true knowledge. Therefore, discard hereafter the evil path and embrace the new nectar, flowing from the common religion. O father, thou shouldst grant these my requests. I should know all the *six antas* and do good to all living beings. I should impart joy to all who come to me. All the worlds should turn to *Sanmārga* leaving behind vain discussions. I should, in the end, obtain thy sacred feet and be merged into it. (4086)

In another verse he says that his request was granted and he was truly and completely changed into the very substance of the Almighty who pervaded every atom of his body.

The teachings of Ramalinga and his practical philosophy of *Suddha Sanmārga* stand unique among the contributions to Tamil saints and sages. Coming, as he did, in the tradition of the great Siddhas who had dedicated their lives for the service of mankind, Ramalinga made social service and reform part and parcel of his religion.

His zeal in seeking the higher than the highest in religion and his message of love which gives hope to the common man to rise to the level of the so-called enlightened beings, together with the universal outlook that pervades his teachings, are challenges to orthodox Saivism in Tamil Nadu. He has paved the way for further reform and rethinking in Saivism.

Ramalinga certainly prepared the way for the Theosophical movement, in India. Yōgi Suddhananda Bharati, a great scholar who had spent a number of years in the Aurobindo Ashram writes

> The Theosophical Society is an offshoot of Ramalinga's ideal of one humanity. Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* and *Synthesis of Yōga* breathe with the important truths discovered by Ramalinga. The descent of the Supernatural Force and the transformation of the human substance into the Divine was really an idea of Ramalinga...Mahatma Gandhi fulfilled Ramalinga's great passion for Ahimsa.[17]

Ūraṉaṭikaḷ has rightly pointed out that the first one to establish a spiritual *Sangam* in Tamil Nadu was Ramalinga.

It must be stated here that Ramalinga has distinguished himself as a saintly poet of the masses. His simple, chaste and crisp style of Tamil poetry has given inspiration to the national poet Subramanya Bharati (18821921), who has called himself a Siddha, and a host of poets who came after him including Paṭṭukōṭṭai Kalyāṇasundaram and Kaṇṇadasan, who have become popular through their cine songs.

IV

THE SAMARASA SUDDHA SAṈMĀRGA SANGAM

More than a hundred years have passed now since the inception of the Sangam. The centenary celebration took place in Chennai on a grand scale from 11th to 13th June 1965. There is nothing remarkable in the early years of its history except the fact that meetings and conferences were conducted and the poor were fed. The then leaders of the Sangam were chiefly concerned with the reopening of the Sabai which was closed by the orders of Ramalinga in 1873. It was reopened two years after the earthly life of Ramalinga on the initiative of a Brahmin priest. He claimed that Ramalinga had appeared to him in a dream and had asked him to take action for the reopening of the Sabai. Daily and monthly *pujas* at the Sabai were introduced. The Sangam at this stage was satisfied with the regular worship at the Sabai and the feeding of the poor at the Dharmasalai. No systematic attempt was made to spread the message of Ramalinga and thus to strengthen the organizational set-up of the Sangam.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the Sangam received the support and sympathy of two outstanding Saivite Tamil scholars, namely Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ (Swamy Vedachalam) and Thiru V.Kalyanasundaranar. Maraimalai Aṭikaḷ fought against the orthodox Saivites who for the second time publicly denounced the writings of Ramalinga. Thiru V.Kalyanasundaranar was much influenced by Ramalinga and strove during his life-time to give popularity to the teachings of Ramalinga. He presided over the annual conference of the Sangam in 1929 at Vaṭalūr. His

presidential address which was later published is full of deep insights into the teachings of Ramalinga.[1]

The Sangam was officially registered in the name of *Samarasa Suddha Sanmārga Sathyia Sangam* in 1946 with its headquarters at Vaṭalūr. During the past the Sangam has had steady growth. It is estimated that there are about 138 branches of the Sangam in Tamil Nadu. Apart from the regular members, there are a number of sympathisers and supporters of the Sangam.

The main activities of the Sangam include organizing of conferences at state and district levels and feeding the poor at the Dharamasālai every day and in the branches on important occasions.

The Sangam has taken interest in running schools and boarding homes in the Sabai campus at Vaṭalūr. By the efforts of two leading members, O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar (a former chief minister of Tamilnadu) and D. Perumal Chettiar, this was made possible. The latter started running five hostels, free of charge for about two hundred boys studying in various schools. The Sangam published for some time the monthly *aruṭcuṭar* edited by *Turavi* Kandasamy, an ascetic follower of Ramalinga. Some other journals were published from time to time from Chennai, Tirunelveli and Coimbatore.

Several missionary bodies have started functioning. Two of these, *Kānchi* Ramalinga Mission and Cirūvācciyūr Ramalinga Mission, are affiliated to the Sangam. The Tamil Nadu Ramalinga Mission and Aruṭjōti Ramalinga Mission are functioning as independent bodies. The former was founded in 1950 and it runs

a primary school in Vadapaḻani, Chennai. Aruṭjōti Ramalinga Mission was organized at the initiative of Sri V.M. Gadigachalam, a leading lawyer and honorary magistrate.

These missionary bodies are chiefly concerned with the propagation of the teachings of Ramalinga. Aruṭjōti Ramalinga Mission members have several times undertaken *pādayātras,* taking the message of Ramalinga to the villagers with the purpose of organizing auxiliary Sangams.

Mention must be made of Sri Giridhari Prasad. He is a Gujarati by birth and has settled in Coimbatore. He is a lawyer. He is considered to be one of the able exponents of the teachings of Ramalinga. He knows about ten Indian languages and is familiar with the teachings of the saints and reformers of the north ; he gives scholarly discourses, putting before the people the message of Ramalinga alongside the teachings of Kabir, Meera, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He has achieved remarkable fluency in expressing himself in Tamil. He is well-versed in *Tiruvaruṭpā* and several other works of devotional poetry in Tamil. He has travelled all over Tamil Nadu propagating the teachings of Ramalinga, often under the auspices of the Arutjoti Ramalinga Mission. He has also taken the message of Ramalinga to Malaysia, Burma, Sri Lanka and Japan. He is described by Tamiḻvāṇaṉ, an ardent follower of Ramalinga and an accepted writer in Tamil, as the 'Vivekananda of Ramalinga'. Tamiḻvāṇaṉ has written a short biography of Giridhari Prasad,[2] apart from interesting articles about him[2] and the activities of Arutjoti Ramalinga Mission in his magazine *Kalkaṇṭu,* widely read in Tamil Nadu by the youth.

Some prominent politicians in Tamil Nadu are also showing interest in the propagation of the message of Ramalinga, and they actively participate in the affairs of the Sangam. Thiru. N. Mahalingam, an ex-Congress M.L.A., served the Sangam as one of its Vice-Presidents. Thiru. M.P. Sivagnanam, the founder of the Tamilarasu Kazhagam, though not a formal member of the Sangam, has participated in several of the conferences and meetings of the Sangam. He has written an excellent book on Ramalinga under the title *Vaḷḷalār Kaṇṭa Orumaippāṭu* ("The integration visualized by *Vaḷḷalār*") in which he points out the relevance of Ramalinga's teachings for the affairs of the country at the present time. He contends that Ramalinga is the greatest reformer of our times and that he was the first to speak of national integration, on the basis of which ideology universal brotherhood has to be built up. He also maintains that Ramalinga had a clear vision of a socialistic pattern of society towards which the country is moving today. This book won the President's Award. The name of Ūraṉaṭikaḷ, a recent biographer of Ramalinga, should also be mentioned here. He had served as Town Planning Inspector for twelve years in the municipalities of Srirangam, Tiruchy and Vellore. In 1967, on his thirty-fifth birthday, he became an ascetic. He lives in Vaṭalūr and serves as the secretary of the Suddha Sanmarga Nilayam in Vaṭalūr and as a trustee of the Sabai. He has written a book on the history of Vaṭalūr and another one about Ramalinga in Tamil. His biography of Ramalinga is considered to be the most informative among the numerous books written about him. It contains about six hundred pages.

The Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sathia Sangam of the North Arcot District organized weekly lectures on the works of Ramalinga in 1966. Rasapati Aṭikaḷ was expounding the cantos of *Tiruvaruṭpā* for two years. His lectures were printed in eight volumes. After his sudden death in January 1968, Palur Kannappa Mudaliar has continued writing commentaries for the series. Four more volumes were printed in the following year. Thiru A. Balakrishnan, a lawyer and a follower of Ramalinga, took up the work of re-editing *Tiruvaruṭpā* after his retirement and completed it in twelve volumes. He has translated a number of poems of Ramalinga into English. These are published in the form of a book, sponsored by Aruṭjōti Ramalinga Mission in 1966, six years after his death.

Thiru P. Mutharasu, a Saivite Tamil scholar, has written a biography of Ramalinga in English and has translated fifty selected poems from *Tiruvaruṭpā*.

It is noteworthy that Christians and Muslims have also spoken from the Sangam platform paying their tributes to Ramalinga. The list of the speakers for the South Arcot District conference of the Sangam held at Vaṭalūr from 17th to 19th January 1965 included the names of the Rev. S.W. Savarimuthu and Thiru N.A. Rasheed.

It must however be stated here that there is a growing dissatisfaction among some members of the Sangam regardig its affairs. Those members of the Sangam who have a deep concern for its growth constantly point out the divisions and disunity that exist in the organization, chiefly due to difference of opinion among the leaders. Another criticism coming from within the

Sangam is that it is gradually deviating from the main teachings of Ramalinga by entertaining communalism and encouraging idol worship, particularly of the image of Ramalinga. The attempts to bring together the leaders of the Sangam and the Missions to work out a constructive programme of activities have not yet been fruitful.

According to the information available through Thiru Baghiradhan, Secretary, Ramalingar Paṇi Manram, Chennai, the Manram is renewing its activities in various parts of Tamil Nadu. Although there are hundred and thirty-eight branches of the mission, only a few of them are active with any definite socio-religious programme. At a place called Chiṉṉāḷapaṭṭi in Madurai District Sri Ramalinga Saṉmārga Sangam has opened a free medical dispensary. Siddha and Ayurvedic treatment is offered free to the rural poor. At Coimbatore the Sangam has made an impact on the citizens by administering a daily feeding of not less than hundred poor persons. Meetings to propagate the teachings of Ramalinga and street preachings are also organised occasionally under the patronage of Thiru N. Mahalingam, Chairman, Ramalingar Pani Manram. The other activities include free treatment to the poor at H.J. Hospital and work among drug addicts. An annual *Pādāyatra* from Chennai to Vaṭalūr is organised every year in which about hundred people participate. They march their way to Vaṭalūr halting at a number of places to preach the message of Ramalinga to the rural folk.

The Ramalingar Paṇi Manram at Chennai organises the birthday celebration of Ramalinga Swamy on 5th October every year. The celebration which continues for a week includes

discourses on *Tiruvaruṭpā* and special lectures by eminent scholars.

A serious handcap for the Sangam is the lack of structural and organizational set-up. A few magazines and newsletters published in the past are not in circulation now and the authentic Sangam publications are only a few in number. The Samarasa Sa<u>n</u>mārga Ārāycci Nilaiyam at Vaṭalūr continues to be the only official publishing house; which sends out reprints of Ramalinga's life history and *Tiruvaruṭpā*. The services of Ūra<u>n</u>aṭikaḷ, an ardent follower and apostle of Ramalinga, are to be highly commended. The Sangam has not given serious thought to engage itself in nation building activities. The pietistic tendencies are more dominant than the spirit of service. There is hope for the Sangam and the mission agencies to make their own contributions to the religious and social lives of the Tamils, if, like the Quakers they take to the spirit of service. By joining hands with religious movements which have similar objectives, the Sangam can strive to build up friendy inter-faith dialogue between them and work for maintaining communal harmony in the present day pluralistic set-up of the Indian society.

APPENDIX

(The following is a prayer written by Ramalinga Swamy for the use of the members of the Sangam. The Sangamites recite the prayer together with a few selected verses from *Tiruvaruṭpā.*)

O God who art mysterious, all-possessing and glorious Light of Grace, we beseech thee to grant unto us, that from now on our minds be kept untainted by the varying observances of religions, sects, *mārgas* and *varna-asrama.* We pray thee to make the truth of Oneness of all souls in love; the chief ideal of Suddha *Sanmārga* abound in us at all times and at all places. O Lord of Gracious Light, we hail thee for thy unique and gracious compassion.

END NOTES

I

1. According to Saiva Siddhanta, *Dasamarga, Satputramarga* and *Sahamarga,* the three paths which represent *Carya, Kriya* and *Yoga,* are transcended by *Sanmarga* which represents the path of *jnana.*

2. Scholars agree that the date of this book could not be later than second century B.C.

3. *pirava jakkaip periyon*

4. A.V. Subramania Iyer, *The Poetry and the Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhars,* p. 3.

5. An interesting study in comparison is made by A.S. Vazhittunairman in his *Vallalarum Vasagarum.*

II

1. Translation by P. Mutharasu in *Hymns of Tiruvarutpa,* p.73.

   The numbers refer to the order followed in *Tiruvarutpa,* (ed.) Ooran Adigal, Vadalur : Samarasa Sanmarga Aaraicci Nilayam, 1972.
   Unless otherwise stated the translations are by T. Dayanandan Francis.

2. Although Muruga is depicted as the younger son of Siva in the *Puranas,* he represents a divine form of Siva.

3. Muruga holds a spear (vel) in his hand. It is

interpreted as sakti and jnana.

4. The twelfth book of *Saiva Tirumurai* or Devotional Poetry. In it is recorded the biography of sixty-three Nayanmars. The work belongs to the twelfth century A.D. Its author is Sekilar. The entire book is in verse form.

5. Translation by Mutharasu.

6. Translation by Mutharasu.

7,8,9. Translation by Mutharasu.

10. Translation by Mutharasu.

11,12. Translation by Balakrishnan.

13. Special puja offered in the month of Tai. It takes place in January.

14. Translation by Mutharasu.

15. Translation from Danish by Dr. Kaj Baago, formerly of the United Theological College, Bangalore.

16. This statement is found in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy.*

17. M.P. Sivagnanam, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu.*

18. Ooran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaru,* Vadalur : Samarasa Sanmarga Aaraicci Nilayam,, Appendix 8, p. 39.

III

1. An account of the Tamil Cittars is found in Kamil Zwelebil's, *The Poets of Power*, London : Rider & Company, 973. A similar presentation is found in Company, 973. A similar presentation is found in A.V. Subramania Aiyer's *The Poetry and Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas*, Chidambaram, Manivasagar Noolagam, 1969,pp.47,48.

2. Tamil Siddhas in The Sants, Schomer & Mcleod, (eds.), New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, p.399.

3. *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

4. The number of Verses refer to Cittar Padalgal, Aru. Ramanathan (ed) Madras: Prema Prasuram, 1970. The Tamil renderings are by T. Dayanandan Francis.

5. *Pasupata Sutra*, 3, 11-17. Quoted in David Kinglsley, Through the Looking Glass, *History of Religion* (HOR), Vol.13, p.294

6. Madras University Tamil Lexicon, Vol.III

7. Maraimalai Adigal, *Saiva Siddhanta Jnanabudham*, p.65.

8. Isaac Thambiah, *Hymns of a Saiva Saint*, London; p.xxxl.

9. Ibid;l p.xxxi.

10. Op. cit., p.69.

11. Op. cit., p.82.

12. For further details see T.P. Meenashisundaram's article on *Cittars* in *Kalaikkalanjiam* (Tamil Encyclopaedia), Madras University, Vol. IV, 1982.

13. Tiruvalluvar does not reveal his religious affinities in his work *Tirukkural*. The date assigned to him is first century A.D.

14. *The Life of St. Ramalinga,* Samarasa Sanmarga Sangam, Tirunelveli-6, p. 82.

15. "Economic Vision of Ramalinga", in the *Centenary Souvenir of the Sangam,* 1965, p. 89.

16. In the Foreword to Mutharasu's book, referred to above.

17. *I Corinthians,* 13 : *I John* 3 : 11-18 ; 4:20, 21.

18. Yogi Suddhananda Bharati, "The Clarion Call of Ramalingam", in the *Centenary Souvenir of the Sangam,* Madras : 1965, pp. 129-130.

IV

1. *Ramalinga Swamigal Tiruvullam,* Madras : Sadhu Press, 1962 (Fourth Edition).

2. Giridhari Prasad, (Madras : Manimegalai Prasuram).

3. Kalkandu, Ed. by Tamilvanam (16-9-1965 and 16-12-1965) 83, Purasawalkam High Road, Madras.

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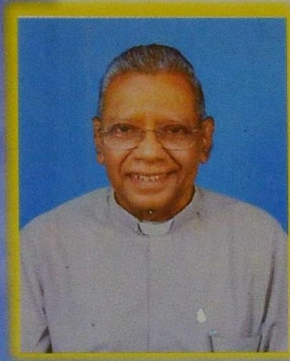
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